



Tattered U.S. Flags Disrespect Country, Veterans

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The nation will take time out on Nov. 11 to salute the sacrifices and commitment of a special breed of American: our veterans — whether they are active, served their time enlisted or drafted, retired, wounded or lost at war.

But honoring our men and women in uniform, and the freedoms they fight for, is not a celebration reserved for just one day a year. Every day, many of us — individuals, businesses and government agencies alike — pay our respects to America, and her defenders, with a simple yet meaningful exercise: by flying the Stars and Stripes.

So it is a pathetic sight indeed, especially for local veterans, to look across the Illinois Metro East and St. Louis Metropolitan landscapes (well, anywhere actually) and see how too many of us are paying those respects in a most disrespectful way. Hanging tattered, torn and shredded at the top of a number of flagpoles throughout the region, Old Glory is looking more like a discarded rag than a symbol of deep national pride.

It's a disgrace, all the more so with American troops serving around the globe or fighting for their lives and our freedoms. The least we can do is treat the country's most revered emblem with the respect it deserves.

Of course, American flags that fly 24 hours a day a couple dozen or so feet in the air are subject to the brutal heat, wind, rains and other elements. But those are known factors that must be taken into account before someone decides to wave the flag outside his home or business.

Flying Old Glory is not a flippant affair. Every flag-waving American's duty is to follow the Flag Code signed by President Roosevelt in 1942, decreeing that "no disrespect" be shown to the U.S. flag. That means replacing the symbol when it becomes torn and tattered, and discarding old flags with dignity "preferably by burning."

Maybe it's because the code is more of a moral requirement than a legal one, without penalty for violations that far too many individuals and businesses feel they can get away with thumbing their noses at its demand for dignity and respect for the flag.

Sure, you can't get in "trouble" in the legal sense for flying a pathetically deteriorated national symbol, but those who do pay a price in disgrace. Because there's nothing flattering about a person or business that chooses to fly the Stars and Stripes, then leaves it hanging in neglect and dishonor.

After all, people fly the flag to show their patriotism and national pride, but both take a serious hit when the flags they're flying are torn to forgotten shreds. So do yourself, the nation's veterans and perhaps even your business a favor: If you can't treat Old Glory with the respect it deserves, take it down, discard it properly, and hang something else up there, something that doesn't pierce the heart of a veteran when it's not cared for properly.

Charlie Baird

Godfrey, Illinois