

Diana Russell-Milton
2025-2026 Americanism Ambassador/Patriotic Instructor
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Hello, Diana, my name is Michelle Payne and I have the honor of being the Department of South Dakota Americanism Chairman for the 2025 -2026 year. I joined the VFW Auxiliary through my husband, Ken Payne, who is a Navy Veteran. We reside in Plankinton, South Dakota and are members of the Aurora County Post # 6554. We have two young adult daughters who are also Life Members of the VFW Auxiliary. VFW has been an important part of our family since our girls were quite little; they have helped put flags out on Main Street for years, attended and sometimes participated in the Memorial Day programs, setting up and taking down crosses at the cemetery, Veterans Day programs, Loyalty Day banquets, selling poppies, etc.

I am employed full-time as the Admissions & Aftercare Coordinator for Aurora Plains Academy in Plankinton, South Dakota, which is an adolescent treatment program. I have been with Aurora Plains for seventeen years. I double majored in Human Services and Criminal Justice and feel it's important to help others as best you can.

Since a young girl I was in awe of my Grandfather Frank "Ray" Munson and his brother, my Great-Uncle James A. Munson. Although as a young girl I truly had no idea what their service in the Army entailed. Grandpa Munson was a World War II Veteran. Great Uncle Jim was a World War II, Korea and Vietnam Veteran. Now, as a grown woman, remembering some stories they were willing to share, I am truly grateful for their sacrifice and service to our Country.

Other members of my family who have served include one brother-in-law in the Air Force, one brother-in-law in the Navy, and my father-in-law who served in the Army.

I am looking forward to developing new relationships and learning more about what other communities are doing to support our Veterans.

Sincerely,

Michelle Payne

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