

LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: HOMEGROWN HEROES

Friday, December 15, 2017 at 10:00 p.m. ET on PBS (Check Local Listings)

Internationally Renowned Chef Lidia Bastianich Salutes the Veterans Who Now Cultivate the Land They Bravely Fought to Defend in a New Holiday TV Special



Credit: Meredith Nierman/WGBH

NEW YORK (November 20, 2017) – Across America, combat veterans are quietly returning to the land, digging in, and creating new lives as farmers and caretakers. This holiday season, internationally-acclaimed chef, author and food ambassador Lidia Bastianich pays tribute to the military men and women who have sacrificed so much, and continue to give back to their country.

In ***LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: Homegrown Heroes***, an uplifting new television special co-produced with public media powerhouse WGBH, Lidia Bastianich journeys across the country—from just outside of Buffalo to rural farm areas of West Virginia to Kentucky and finally to the West Coast—to farm with and cook with veterans who have found a new way to help themselves and others on the homefront. She then pays homage to them by cooking them a Lidia-inspired meal in California, the breadbasket of America.

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A life-long believer in the power of food as the tie that binds us together, Lidia celebrates food diplomacy and supports our troops in ***Homegrown Heroes***, a film that shares personal stories of triumph, struggle and resilience from men and women in the Armed Forces who are making the transition from the military to a new life dedicated to farming.

For many veterans, re-entering civilian life and the workforce can be challenging due to physical limitations, emotional trauma or battle scars. Lidia visits veterans who are growing food, beekeeping, raising livestock, maple sugaring, and more. The types of farming may vary—rural farming, urban farming, micro farming, fish farming, orchard farming—but the outcomes are similar. Transitioning to this new life is therapeutic and helps them reconnect in meaningful ways with their communities.

“Food feeds our souls. It is the single great unifier across all cultures. The table offers a sanctuary and a place to come together for unity and understanding,” says Bastianich. “Returning home can be a tough adjustment for our military men and women, but ***LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: Homegrown Heroes*** shows how dedicated veterans are finding food and farming to be a rewarding path back to purposeful civilian lives.”

LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: Homegrown Heroes culminates in a festive celebration with veteran farmers joining Lidia for a large family-style dinner at a picturesque vineyard in Woodside, CA, where Lidia prepares a meal of braised short ribs, stuffed tomatoes, mashed potatoes with green beans, stir-fried patty pan squash with peppers, and more. The dishes are inspired by her travels and made from ingredients gathered at a local farm.

To connect with veteran farmers across the land, **LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA** teamed up with Farmer Veteran Coalition, an organization that mobilizes veterans to feed America and transitions them from military service to farming.

The Featured Veterans

— **Mark and Denise Beyers (East Aurora, NY)** were high school sweethearts who fell in love, then joined the U.S. Marines together. Mark lost his right arm and leg in an IED explosion while deployed in Iraq. The couple has a 15-acre ranch near Buffalo where they farm maple trees for syrup, raise turkeys and chickens, and sell eggs and honey.

— **Alvina Maynard (Richmond, KY)**, a US Air Force veteran and reservist, finds humor and healing in the herd of alpacas she raises for fiber, wool, and meat on her Kentucky ranch. She talks of the pleasures of farm life and the value of hard work and caring for living things.

— **Edgar Hercila (Anaheim, CA)**, is a first-generation American and a U.S. Army Corporal who served in Iraq, where he was tasked with agricultural development and rebuilding. He continues to serve his country as an urban farmer and CEO of Civitas Organics, an organic company that utilizes aquaponic technologies—an entirely sustainable type of gardening. He has created a symbiotic aquaculture system for raising tilapia and growing basil.

— **Nate Looney (Anaheim, CA)** is a Sergeant in the National Guard who was on duty in New Orleans when the levees broke after Hurricane Katrina, and who later served in Iraq. He's a fifth-generation farmer. Today, Nate is growing microgreens through hydroponics, which uses water instead of soil to farm. He's been sharing space with fellow veteran Corporal Hercila, while building his own company, Westside Urban Gardens. Nate thinks food security is an important issue and believes veterans have the "never quit" attitude that all good farmers need to possess.

— **Jon Darling (McClellanville, SC)** a veteran U.S. Army Ranger, enlisted in the military after 9/11, and worked six deployments in four years to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. After the military, he fought depression and even had a few run-ins with the law. Farming became the answer for him, providing him with purpose and helping to relieve his PTSD. He and his wife began by sheep farming and now raise hybrid hogs on their six-acre farm in South Carolina.

— **Calvin Riggelman (Loom, WV)**, a US Marine veteran known to friends as "Bigg Rigg," returned from Iraq's front lines to work on his family's 134 acres of land, which he grew up farming in the hills of West Virginia. He grows fruits and vegetables, manages a farm stand, travels to farmers' markets, makes his own jams, jellies and sauces, and distills several kinds of local moonshine from the produce he grows.

— **Kelly Carlisle (East Oakland, CA)** became an urban farmer to give back to the poor, tough neighborhood where she grew up. Gardening taught her that growth—including growing your mind, your body, and your ideas--starts with a seed. After serving as an Operations Specialist in the US Navy and Navy Reserve, she founded a non-profit urban farm project to serve at-risk youth.

— **Matt Smiley (Davis, CA)** is a former paratrooper and disabled veteran who works on an eight-acre farm. As US Army Veteran Outreach Coordinator for the Farmer Veteran Coalition he trains other veterans to help them find meaningful careers in agriculture. He says farming feels similar to deployment because it requires being outdoors, incredible teamwork, and hard work, and it gives a sense of purpose.

Series Description

LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA is a lively exploration of the rich diversity of cultures across the United States, and the vibrant ethnic and religious customs and traditions observed by various groups--in which food is a common denominator that connects all human beings. Previous programs focused on the different ways Americans celebrate weddings, holiday traditions, independence, and life's milestones. For more program information, visit pbs.org/lidiacelebratesamerica. To view recipes featured in the series, go to PBS Food: pbs.org/food. **Lidia Celebrates America** series DVDs, *Best of Lidia: Pastas* DVD, *Mastering the Art of Italian Cuisine* cookbook and more are available at shoppbs.org. Every purchase supports PBS.

For images and additional up-to-date information on this and other PBS programs, visit PBS Press Room at pbs.org/pressroom.

To download recipes, watch video previews, and see behind-the-scenes images and stories on featured veterans or obtain additional veterans' resources, go to pbs.org/lidiacelebratesamerica.

PRODUCTION CREDITS:

Underwriter: Corporation for Public Broadcasting

Producers: WGBH Boston and Tavola Productions

Executive producers: Lidia Bastianich and Laurie Donnelly

LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: Homegrown Heroes is a production of WGBH Boston and Tavola Productions. Lidia Bastianich is host. Executive Producers are Lidia Bastianich and Laurie Donnelly.

Funding for **LIDIA CELEBRATES AMERICA: Homegrown Heroes** is provided by The Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

About Lidia Bastianich

Lidia Bastianich is an Emmy award-winning public television host, a best-selling cookbook author, restaurateur, and owner of a flourishing food and entertainment business. Her longtime series on public television include the current *Lidia's Kitchen*, in addition to *Lidia's Italy*, *Lidia Celebrates America*, *Lidia's Family Table* and more. She is the chef and owner/co-owner of four acclaimed New York City restaurants – Felidia, Becco, Esca and Del Posto, as well as Lidia's Pittsburgh and Lidia's Kansas City. She is also founder and president of Tavola Productions, an entertainment company that produces high quality broadcast productions. Lidia also has a line of pastas and all natural sauces called LIDIA'S. Along with her son, Joe Bastianich, Mario Batali and Oscar Farinetti, the team opened Eataly, the international artisanal Italian food and wine marketplace with two locations in New York City, plus Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago and Sao Paulo, Brazil. Lidia has authored, or co-authored with her daughter Tanya Bastianich Manuali, ten cookbooks including the new *Lidia's Celebrate Like An Italian: 220 Foolproof Recipes That Make Every Meal a Party*.

About Tavola Productions

Founded by Lidia Bastianich, Tavola Productions, an entertainment company that produces award-winning broadcast productions of quality, including *Lidia's Kitchen*, *Lidia's Family Table*, *Lidia's Italy* and *Lidia's Italy in America*.

About WGBH

Public media producer WGBH is America's preeminent public broadcaster and the largest creator of PBS content for TV and the Web, including *Masterpiece*, *Antiques Roadshow*, *Frontline*, *Nova*, *American Experience*, *Arthur*, *Pinkalicious & Peterrific* and more than a dozen other primetime, lifestyle and

children's series. WGBH's television channels include WGBH 2, WGBX 44, and the digital channels World and Create. WGBH Radio serves listeners across New England with 89.7 WGBH, Boston's Local NPR®; 99.5 WCRB Classical Radio Boston; and WCAI, the Cape and Islands NPR® Station. WGBH also is a major source of programs for public radio (among them, *PRI's The World*®), a leader in educational multimedia (including PBS LearningMedia™, providing the nation's educators with free, curriculum-based digital content), and a pioneer in technologies and services that make media accessible to deaf, hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired audiences. WGBH has been recognized with hundreds of honors: Emmys, Peabodys, duPont-Columbia Awards and Oscars. Find more information at wgbh.org

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