Between various states’ months long shelter-in-place orders and other restrictions issued by governments of all levels during the coronavirus pandemic, Americans might feel that they’re living in the home of the brave, but not so much the land of the free. Now we are starting to feel more tension as we begin to take one step forward to reopen then two-steps back adding more restrictions. Even though the crisis is far from over, Americans are expressing they are “so over” it. Social distancing has gone on since winter, and for those who have suffered through the loss of loved ones and jobs, this ordeal has been an especially painful journey. Memorial Day weekend came with opened beaches, bars and restaurants. Followed, two weeks later, by hundreds of positive coronavirus tests. Now what? What about our Independence Day?

It’s not as if the country doesn’t have experience dealing with pandemics at this time of year. Smallpox, measles and other diseases had wary colonists shutting themselves in their houses at the time future president John Adams correctly predicted that the first Independence Day would be celebrated with “bonfires and illuminations.” So here we are, two and a half centuries later, American history will repeat itself when patriotic citizens ooh and aah to star-spangled fireworks under pandemic conditions. Since many cities across the U.S. have already cancelled Independence Day parades, concerts and fireworks displays, what are we to do and continue to remain safe? One way humans cope through crisis is by sharing happy and entertaining physical experiences, even in the era of social distancing. So, even though the holiday might look a little different this year, it doesn't mean you can't still have a blast on summer's best holiday. With plenty of fun family activities and festive at-home ideas, you can still make this year's Fourth of July the best-ever yet!

So get ready to celebrate our nation's independence. Gather up the family, get the popcorn ready, pop in the great film Independence Day and count your blessings because there is still so much to enjoy and be grateful for this holiday weekend!!

1. Start by baking (or buying from a small home business bakery!) some patriotic desserts!! You can't celebrate America's birthday without some red, white, and blue desserts! After baking some of the best cupcakes, brownies, and 4th of July cakes, the whole family can join in on the festive decorating — or even compete in a friendly bake-off.
2 Have a backyard movie night!!
Warm weather is here, but with stay-at-home orders remaining in place across the country, there’s no guarantee that this year’s summer season is going to resemble those of the recent past. A pastime as simple as dinner and a movie is one of many we’re setting aside in order to protect ourselves and those around us. Level up your standard movie night by setting up a screening — and some cozy seating — right out on your lawn, then picking out an All-American movie that’s perfect for the holiday. Don’t forget the popcorn!

3 Go camping in your backyard.
It’s not a 4th of July celebration without a campfire and some s’mores! If you can’t make it to a real campsite this year, try a little backyard camping instead — just set up a tent (along with a great cookout, of course), and cap off the night with some scary stories around the fire.

4 Have a game night.
Looking for something that’s fun for the whole family? Organize a game night with some of the best board games — and if you want to make it on theme with the holiday, try out some special patriotic games (like 4th of July bingo or some American-themed trivia).

5 Grab some fireworks and sparklers of your own!
You can still enjoy some fireworks safely from your home this year! Even just sparklers are fun! Sparklers are a great alternative to big, loud fireworks. But just because they’re a little tamer doesn’t mean they can’t be dangerous. To celebrate safely, keep a hose or bucket of water close by, and choose a clear area away from houses, leaves, spectators, and other flammable materials. ***Remember to supervise children around sparklers!! They are fun but are as hot as a blow torch.

6 Get crafty with the kids or friends!
What better way to keep the little ones occupied than with a fun holiday craft? Plus, easy-to-make flower pots double as a great 4th of July décor or gift! Rock painting is a wonderful whole family activity! Whatever your heart dreams up can be painted on a rock to decorate inside or outside (Just spray with a sealant!) Or, for even more fun and a chance to make someone else smile, leave the rocks around your neighborhood, libraries, fire stations, police stations or hospitals. These are called Kindness Stones meant to bring joy to perfect strangers. What a lovely tradition to start with your kids especially now when we could all use a “pick me up”.

You can also go to the Family Advocacy Program FB page for even more family fun ideas to celebrate life all throughout the summer! https://www.facebook.com/FTdrumFAP/

Wishing you, your families, friends and loved ones a safe and happy Independence Day from myself and the staff of ASAP!!

I also want to thank everyone on Fort Drum for their dedication and hard work in support of the Soldiers, Families and fellow Civilian Employees. As we celebrate our nation’s Independence Day, I hope you will also join me in taking a moment to remember our men and women in uniform, and their families, who make so many sacrifices to preserve our freedoms.