

REGION VIII 2009 CONVENTION SPEECH

I am honored to have served as your Region VIII Vice President and member of the National Executive Board for the past six months.

Your National Executive Board has tackled some very serious issues with the hope of strengthening NARFE, increasing participation and growing our membership. Perhaps all issues have not been well received – BUT – these issues are vital to the health, well being and growth of NARFE.

The NEB realizes the difficulties you face in trying to keep your chapter vibrant and meaningful to the new retirees and active federal employees.

In an attempt to help you face those difficulties the NEB has developed a strategic plan which was provided as part of my NEB report last November.

It is a work in progress on the part of our Headquarters staff and it is being implemented by improvements to our National Website, our National Magazine, and our brochures and in researching how other Advocacy Organizations have prospered and succeeded, so NARFE may implement similar practices.

The Strategic Plan contains actions for Chapters and Federations for addressing issues locally. Perhaps many of your chapters are working on addressing these issues: Apathy, Unity, Member Involvement, Development of Chapter Leaders and growth of your chapter membership, but you have been very quiet about it. We need to know what you are doing, especially your successes – so we can share them with the NEB, and all Federation Presidents.

National Headquarters has also provided a sample Membership Action Plan for use by chapters and federations – and I know that some chapters have developed local plans, and if you will share them with me, I will share them with the NEB and Federation Presidents.

You see, it's that old adage, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." NARFE has been here for you for 88 years, protecting and enhancing benefits of the federal community and we can't let it fail on our watch.

We **NEED** to retain our current members – we **NEED** to grow – we **NEED** to encourage new leaders and we **NEED** more new ideas, and new enthusiasm to grow NARFE into a household word, which is recognized by all.

I hope you all review the latest F-18, Requisition for Printed Supplies, for the new brochures and purge your supply of forms, so you have the latest version. You might especially note the F-122, "*What Has NARFE Done for You Lately?*"; the new version includes reference to the fact that NARFE helped defeat the latest effort by Congress in the 2009 House Budget Resolution, to cut our federal civilian retirement and health benefits by nearly five billion dollars over the next five years. This F-122 is an excellent Retention and Recruiting Tool for retirees, along with its companion brochure, the F-123, "*Pop Quiz Brochure*" as a Recruiting Tool for the active federal employee.

Headquarters realizes the need for some POSITIVE changes as we watch our membership decline; we need to keep in mind that declining membership directly relates to our clout with Congress. NARFE's membership numbers are not a pretty sight – Nationally – we have 315,558 members in 54 Federations and 1,449 chapters.

In Region VIII there are 35,352 members; Nevada has 2,221 members, Hawaii has 3,646 and California has 28,778. The Philippine Federation has 529 members and the Guam chapter has 178 members.

Our declining membership equals declining revenue and that is why the NEB took a 10% cut across the board in our budgets, and the magazine took a \$200,000 cut in its budget. With a smaller distribution of the magazine, we cannot charge the same rates for advertising and that has resulted in fewer pages in the magazine and the deletion of some features, such as the membership application and the dues withholding application. After many complaints from the members, the application and dues withholding forms will be reinstated on a quarterly basis, starting in the June issue.

Recruiting has been very good, but 80% of the effort was by National, which means the chapters have only recruited 20%.

NARFE was founded as a grass roots association, and frankly, we need your help! I know there are fewer bases and federal facilities, and we can no longer obtain the names and addresses of federal retirees BUT we all have a "Circle of Influence" through people we associate with in our families, our neighbors, in church, service clubs, fraternal organizations and those retirement and reunion parties of our former co-workers. YOU can recruit from them. As the former Region VIII VP, Forney Lundy always stressed, "don't leave home without a membership application". How many of you have one with you, right now?

Hopefully you carry one with you at all times – in your car, your purse, your briefcase and I understand that Forney even carries NARFE membership applications with his golf clubs! You never know when or where you will meet a federal retiree or employee.

If you sign up an Active Federal Employee, not only does your chapter receive \$2 for the new member, but also you will receive an \$8 finder's fee for yourself.

National is offering your chapter an opportunity to increase your treasury with a Recruiting Contest. And, so the small chapters will stand on even ground – the contest is structured for small chapters with 1 to 100 members; medium chapters with 101 – 400 members; and large chapters with 401 or more members. In each category the cash prizes will be \$500 for the most members recruited, \$300 for the second place and \$200 for the third place.

Check the "Recruiter's Journal", and the "Quarterly Newsletter" which are sent to your Chapter President, and appear on the National Web Site for successful ideas to use in recruiting and retention which are shared from other chapters around the country.

To help chapters with recruiting, there are two new posters available for your use. One is more formal with the people in suits and ties, while the other has people in casual attire. You may choose to use whichever you need for your particular situation. People in large metropolitan areas like the "suits", while people in Hawaii like the casual look.

Unfortunately, you have to download them from the Web Site and print them – or you can contact me for copies. I have some of the casual posters available for you to take back to your communities.

Also, as a recruiting tool for the actives, there are bookmarks which have both the NARFE web site address and the toll free membership number. Your Federation President has a supply of them and they can also be obtained

from Headquarters by contacting our National Vice President, Joe Beaudoin. These are for your use at health fairs, pre-retirement seminars and any community events where you hope to recruit new members.

Region VIII Pre-Retirement Seminar Coordinator, Betty Faciane, has resigned and has been replaced by Yoggi Riley of the San Fernando Valley Chapter #61. She is jumping right in with four seminars at NASA-Dryden at Edwards Air Force Base in June and will also give a union presentation on postal voluntary early retirement authority (VERA) and disability retirement in Las Vegas.

Each of these presentations will also include a promotion encouraging attendees to join NARFE. Remember if you have any agency contacts, please let me know and I will forward them to Yoggi and Mary Pierson. Any contact submitted which results in a signed contract for a NARFE pre-retirement seminar will give you a \$100 check from headquarters as a finder's fee.

With all this emphasis placed on recruiting, we can't forget how very important it is to retain the members we currently have. Retention begins the day that new member appears on your M112, or M114, or the first time the new member walks in the door at your chapter meeting. Please welcome them with open arms. Send them a welcome letter, introduce them, assign a mentor to them, so they can learn to appreciate all that NARFE does, and has done for the federal community. Nurture them, train them, and offer them an opportunity to participate in chapter operations, perhaps as a committee member. First impressions are truly lasting, and the better first impression you make the more willing that new member will be to take an active role, by first participating, and later in a leadership capacity. These new members are the future of NARFE and we must develop them to achieve their full potential – as the NARFE leaders of tomorrow.

Region VIII has two new Federation Presidents for the next two years. In California, Andy Morgen of the Palm Springs Chapter is the president-elect and will take office on June 1. In Hawaii, Hank Magee of the Kanoeh Chapter will take office on July 1. In Nevada, Tom Prettyman, has been re-elected since there was no other candidate for the office of Federation President. California also changed their bylaws for term of office to begin the first day of the month following the convention, rather than the traditional July 1 date. The Philippine Federation is not holding a convention this year. Guam is not a federation, as they have only one chapter.

I would be remiss if I did not address the upcoming Referendum dealing with NARFE Dues. This subject of NARFE dues has been discussed at national conventions since 1996, and during the past two national conventions, NARFE dues nearly passed by the required 2/3rds majority. The time for action is now, when all chapters have the opportunity to discuss this matter with all chapter members. Our National President has already discussed many of the details of the referendum, but I think that this issue is so important that we need to talk a little more about it.

NARFE established the \$9.00 chapter dues based on the average of all chapter dues throughout the country which currently range from 0 to \$24. The average is little over \$8, which was rounded up to \$9.00.

We understand that it will actually be a dues increase for some members, and a dues decrease for some members – but this “NARFE dues” is so vitally important to the success and growth of NARFE. This referendum will provide an opportunity for chapters to discuss this matter at your meetings prior to casting your vote.

How important is your COLA to you? I think it's pretty important. In the 16 years since I retired, the COLA has amounted to 44.6%. For someone who retired with an annuity of \$20,000 in 1993, those COLAs have increased your annuity by \$11,000 – while your NARFE national dues have only cost you \$350. \$350 investment for an \$11,000 return – and that's only one thing that NARFE has done for you.

How important is your Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan? The current percentage that you pay for your health care is about 30%, while the government pays 70%. Even though the cost of the health care has increased every year, you still get the benefit of NARFE's efforts in keeping the ratio at about the 70/30% level. These are just two examples of how NARFE is working for you.

Some members might say that NARFE has not enhanced our benefits because our premium conversion and GPO/WEP bills have not passed. The major reason is that premium conversion costs \$12 billion over 10 years and affects a very small "special interest group", 2.3 million federal retirees and survivors. GPO/WEP is projected to cost at least \$80 billion over 10 years and affects not only federal retirees, but also retired teachers, firefighters, and policemen. Forming local coalitions with these groups and working together with them on these issues may be another approach to passage.

You must remember that NARFE's first priority is to keep what we already have. NARFE has done a good job at maintaining our benefits. NARFE has been here for 88 years and hopefully we will continue our legacy well into the future.

Part of that future includes this referendum to simplify our dues structure by establishing NARFE dues. It may not be a perfect fit for all chapters, but think about the fact that there was always a rough draft, a prototype, or a beta version of something. From that first attempt you build and improve – if you pass this referendum NOW, which will become effective for new members joining after January 1, and upon your own dues renewal, you can bring forth resolutions for change or improvement at the National Convention in Grand Rapids. As a former National President once said, NARFE must think globally and act locally. This is your opportunity to consider the best interest of NARFE overall -- and its future, by acting locally to discuss this in your chapters. You might want to hold a special meeting just to discuss or debate the referendum, you might put articles in your newsletter to supplement articles in the NARFE magazine, or you might even include a ballot for your members to return and be tallied.

Voting will be done on one official ballot for each chapter sent to your Chapter Secretary in September with the number of votes determined just like national convention delegates – one vote for each fifty members. You will be allowed to vote in favor, or against, or even split your vote for some in favor and some against depending on the wishes of your chapter. Remember to vote in whole numbers only – no fractions and no decimals. Your ballot must be returned in December.

I appreciate your participation, your dedication and your involvement in NARFE and would like to hear from you regarding your successes and your concerns, so they can be shared with others. I am looking forward to hearing from you very soon.

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