

FFVF

**Volunteer Chapter Presidential
Interviews**



VOLUNTEER CHAPTER PRESIDENTIAL INTERVIEWS

Get To Know Your Fellow Presidents and Chapters (From Interviews with National Board Members)

Central New York Chapter Jerry Orton, President

The chapter is located in central New York State about 6 miles from downtown Syracuse. They are close to Fairmont, NY where Ulysses S. Grant died. The chapter has about 15 members, 2 of which are men. Jerry said they are all getting old and dying off now. Many of the ladies want to quit the chapter now because many of them no longer live in the same town as before.

Most of them are also members of the American Legion Auxiliary and one is a past president of the Auxiliary. They used to have many members which included a Congressman who has since died. In the past the Auxiliary members would also join the FFVF chapter as a group.

1. The chapter gave \$1,000 donation to the Medal of Honor Grove in Valley Forge
2. They donated 2 benches to honor veterans at the local VA hospital (\$1400.00)
3. They served donuts and coffee on Veterans Day in Syracuse at the VA hospital
4. They used to wrap packages at Barnes & Noble for donation money but no longer

They currently have about \$6,000 in their checking account. Jerry said he joined FFVF several years ago when he was president of the Sons of the American Revolution. They had an annual dinner to which he was invited and he joined the chapter as a result. He was born in Fairmont, NY and grew up in Wilton, a town about 150 miles from there. He is retired now and works with his investments. He was an Army respiratory therapist for about 20 years. His wife was a personnel manager for the Auburn Correctional Facility and Community. He worked days and she worked nights except for weekends. When she retired the Correctional facility made her an honorary license plate since that was what they produced.

Interests? American Legion historian A 12 pound black cat, a large dog, and he files obituaries. He likes Amish furniture and goes around searching for more of it. His girlfriend has 4 cats. As we continued conversing he started to feel more positive and told me he would like to start a newsletter. He wants the members to know that dues no longer go to the national organization and dues are no longer necessary. He said there are 3 ladies that are still somewhat interested in continuing.

Dallas Chapter, Texas

Phil John, President

Phil has lived in Texas most of his life. He is retired and he previously owned a mail-order pharmacy company. He is married. His wife is a master gardener who loves iris and travels widely with her hobby. She is 3rd generation Dallas resident and has a wide network of friends in the area. He plays golf but he had back surgery which has limited his golf game. He likes fishing and reading.

This is his first year as president of the chapter. Previously he and his wife were over membership with him as the VP on the Board. The chapter has 2 VPs of Education. Their past president is on the history faculty at TCU. Their VP of Programs, Dennis D'Amico, is an advertising executive and works for FFVF to brand and market their chapter.

They have a VP of membership. Jack and Shirley Smith have been active over 30 years and they have extensive knowledge of the organization and the programs. Jack went to SOS as a youth. They send about 16 students a year back to Valley Forge.

They have a problem interesting teachers to attend from their chapter. From their membership they collect about \$5,000 to 6,000 each year for students. They raise money through donations and they have 2-3 years left from a grant. Essays are used and they solicit them through offering small gifts of money. They had 9 essays from a local school with 8th graders that were quite good. The essays from the high school students were disappointing in grammar and spelling. Their November 8th Awards Banquet is not a fund raiser. They feel it would decrease the number of attendees. They have great speakers e.g. David Eisenhower last year. Their goal is 1 per month. They have a fund raiser in February which is a dinner. They are hoping to get Ken Starr to speak this year. They are considering partnerships with other organizations. e.g. Partners with rotary for a Zoom meeting with David Harmer and 1 student & 1 teacher. It will be a casual discussion.

Los Angeles Chapter

Tanya Caligiuri, President

Tanya Caligiuri (pronounced "call -a -jury") is president of the Los Angeles Chapter. She has some interesting strengths such as being a retired computer programmer, a marketer, and active in Rotary as well as in Freedoms Foundation at VF. When she donates her time to charity it is usually with computer work and newsletter expertise.

She says her chapter is made up of older people who have great connections, most of them are retired, and they are good at giving parties. Apparently they have a committee which deals with students so she does not know the specifics of how they get their students and teachers. Their fund raising comes primarily from a fancy, dressy party each year with tickets at about \$125 each. They also receive donations and the occasional monies from wills. They honor their students who return from Valley Forge with a luncheon where they are honored and to which their parents are invited.

The chapter has a board of directors of about 12 -15 people and a membership of about 80 -90 people who pay dues each year. They find their membership is dwindling as it is for most charities in their area.

As we were conversing I told her of the Sacramento Chapter's use of students for fundraising and for their newsletter. I told her of how they have used the students to make a presentation, accompanied by a director, to a business person with whom they have an appointment. The student has attended the SOA, tells of their experience, and then asks for a donation according to a tiered system. It has been effective. Tanya asked if we can produce a short DVD explaining the program so that chapters such as hers can show it to their membership and rebuild some enthusiasm as well as show them an effective fundraiser. She was enthusiastic about this particular idea.

Tanya's idea: Produce a short video explaining a "best practice". Put it on the website with an announcement to the chapters asking them to view it.

Strength of the chapter:

- Putting on fundraisers in the form of parties.
- Teaching their members how to use Zoom because of Tanya's expertise.
- Producing a newsletter.

Mary Ball Washington Chapter Fred Harvey, President

Fred and his wife live in Heathsville, Virginia, about 80 miles north of Newport News. His family settled Virginia and North Carolina in the 1600s. He is originally from Charleston, West Virginia where he graduated in May 1959 at 17 years of age. He was the in the ROTC and was the Navy company honor man. He enlisted in the Navy after high school, went into the officer corps and retired as a full commander. After retirement he worked for a military contractor in New Jersey and Italy managing maintenance of ships. Retired a second time, moved to Vermont, and bought an old colonial home. After living there 10 years and rebuilding the house he sold it for a large profit and moved. He and his wife have one daughter with a grandchild who came to live with them. They wanted the school with the best ROTC for the grandson. The best was in Las Vegas where they moved for 3 1/2 years while he went to school. He was accepted at all the military academies and went to Virginia Military Institute on a full ride scholarship. Then they moved to Virginia. He has been married 58 years, is almost 80 years old and now lives in an HOA in the middle of nowhere. He walks 3 miles every day.

The chapter is a small organization with about 19 members in a very rural area. Donations: Their donor base has decreased and their fun-raising efforts are now small. It is a struggle to find students. They have fund raisers, membership dues, and they ask local small businesses for donations. Oyster roasts were successful and funded about 5 students for SOA. However, the Navy began using a paint on the undersides of boats which kept barnacles off the boats and caused the barnacles to sink to the bottom. That decimated the oyster beds in Chesapeake Bay. They have had Wine tasting events. The original founder of the chapter still donates \$500 each year. Peanut Sales are their principal fund raiser now. They are salted and roasted in the can and sold for \$11/can. Drop-Jars are put in small businesses with information about the FFVF, how to join, and he has collected \$190 so far from his 5 jars. He collects them every week. Some businesses welcome him and some do not. He hopes to fund a \$500 scholarship from his jars someday. Change-Brellas were used at Wal-Mart in Vermont. They put upside down umbrellas at the checkout lines. People were asked to put spare change in them for local charities. He is hoping to do the same in Virginia.

Awards: After their youth are interviewed and selected they are notified they are going to go to the SOA. When they return they are invited to a luncheon to honor them. This past year they had 4 junior girls who are now graduating seniors. They are giving each of them a \$500 check with no restrictions since the money was raised for them but they couldn't go to the SOA.

New Orleans Chapter

Judge John Grout, President

Judge Grout is president of the New Orleans Chapter.

- 87 years old and retired as a LA State judge in 2011 after 20 years (and 3 death threats)
- retired Marine of 29 years
- 8 years as a scout master
- went to Boys State as a youth
- wife died 4 years ago from COPD as a lifelong smoker
- currently has a widowed lady friend
- very interested in history of all kinds and is a member of SAR, Founders of New Orleans, Society for war of 1812, and others
- very active in Masons
- his late wife introduced him to FFVF about 10 years ago and joined

In confidence he told me: About 3 or 4 years ago he was invited to a meeting to discuss the abolishment of the chapter. The organizers thought that if they disbanded they could split the money in the treasury. This wasn't true. John was asked if he thought they should abolish the chapter and he said no. They asked if he would be the president and he said he would for a year. That was 4 years ago.

He is still president but he doesn't know how many are still active on his board of directors. He knows the treasurer is ready to quit. He knows there are still some people who want to stay active in it but he is ready to retire as president. There is still interest in the chapter and there is \$50,000 in the bank.

Orange County Chapter

Lane Curtis, President

The chapter is located in the Anaheim area of Southern California. One of the charter members was the mother of the present chapter president. When speaking with Lane he said the chapter is on hold right now because it is too much work for him and his wife. Most of the board members are old and they feel there is too much work for them as well. He feels they need a new group of educators, sponsors, and donors as well as new people for their board. The past president, Ora Easley, still wants to be involved as do a few others. Ora lives in Irvine and Lane and Jeanette Curtis live in Anaheim Hills. The chapter currently has their president Lane Curtis, a treasurer, VP Education, VP Awards, and Lane's wife, Jeanette who fills in for other roles.

Lane has been doing the Awards job for several years. Lane and Jeanette have been on the board for 12 years. He is an architect for residences, he runs his business from his home, and has been doing so for the past 30 years. He attended the Spirit of America program when he was a youth in the 70s.

The chapter has been sending about 2-3 students each year to the SOA and 1-2 teachers. They had one board member who knew several leaders on the Board of Education, Eagle Scouts, and Boy Scouts. They looked for students who were interested in government etc. They used to send letters to the schools but that did not yield good results. They most recently contacted previous teachers for the programs for youth, for teachers, and sometimes would send teachers again to Valley Forge. The youth normally come from friends and associates whom they have known.

Donations come in from older people who have been active in the past. However, many of them have passed away.

Their past events have included an awards luncheon in which their youth participated. They honored 3 - 4 awardees and recipients. It was held at the Costa Mesa Country Club and was about \$25/ ticket.

Sacramento Chapter

Emily Matthews, President

As a member of the Sacramento chapter, I have known Emily and her husband Reed for several years. Reed was one of the early members of the board and Emily said she knew he went to dinner meetings for FFVF but really didn't know much about it. They sent their oldest 2 children to the SOA at Valley Forge but it wasn't until Emily and Reed went as chaperones for their third oldest child that she caught the vision of the program. She said she has always been deeply patriotic but "the program was inspiring and it fed her soul". When she returned home she was invited to join the board and she did so.

She grew up in Kaysville, Utah the 8th of 9 children in a close-knit family. She and Reed graduated from BYU and her degree was in humanities. She has been a stay-at-home mom to their 5 children ages 23, 22, 20, 18, and 15. Emily stays busy with family as well as working on community events, volunteering for work in the schools, and for her church in an administrative role with the young women. They have lived in the Sacramento area since 1997.

Chapter: As the president elect she spent a year in training under Larry Brasher, the past president. The chapter has worked on many programs such as:

1. Student Directors. They have their largest number this year, 12 students. They are seated on the board with voting rights. They work in many capacities such as writing and producing the newsletter, fund raising, running the essay contest, working on the education programs in fact they are involved in everything the chapter does and each project is under the mentorship of an adult board member.

2. Ideas for getting students and teachers: - giving 3 brochures to each returning SOA student and asking them to give them to friends. They don't know the success since it has not yet been tracked. - building school clubs (an idea to be worked on this year) - A student director built a power point presentation for the chapter. A presentation based on that will be used when speaking with teachers and donors. - currently Emily took 3 students (1 returning from the SOA and 2 preparing to go) to a social services department meeting after school which included history teachers and others. They had been given 15 minutes to make their presentation about the SOA program and the chapter. They used the web-site and clicked through it and answered questions. During the past 2 —3 years Rocklin High School has produced 30 - 40 students for the program including a teacher who has gone as a chaperone.

3. They held an SOA at a resort in Lake Tahoe recently. David Harmer was a speaker as well as a teacher that was very popular at the Granite Bay High School but would never cooperate with the chapter to announce the program to his students. This was his negative stance for the past 10 years. However, he was asked to go up to the resort and give the keynote address. He agreed much to everyone's surprise. Afterwards he apologized for being so blind and said he will not only cooperate from now on but he wants to be a part of such a great program.

4. They have an outstanding awards banquet every year. Companies are asked to sponsor a table at \$1,000. Tickets to the event are \$50 per seat. All board members purchase seats, SOA students and one parent are given seats at those tables as well as visiting educators are comped as well. Speakers have been local radio hosts, mayor of Sacramento and many others. I asked Emily to write a paper explaining how they organize the banquet, who is invited, who speaks, etc. It really is a great event. Challenges? Getting teachers on board. They also want to get teachers to go to Valley Forge as chaperones and several have been invited but it is hard to get them.

Tucson Chapter

Chrissi Richards, President

I met with Chrissi in Tucson about a year ago. She is a delightful, high energy, attractive mother of 5 children and the wife of a retired Air Force forensic psychiatrist. They have lived in many areas of the world and when they retired they picked Tucson as their home of choice. She attended the SOA at Valley Forge as a teen. Her daughter, Rosemary, attended Valley Forge with a small Texas chapter as their only youth and their daughter Vanessa went from the Tucson chapter last year.

The Tucson chapter had an active president for several years. However, he was a one man show; he raised the money, got the youth and teachers, and handled almost all other work required. Chrissi attended the meetings and was a volunteer. When the president retired, Chrissi was made the president.

Students & Teachers: She invited several teachers to lunch in a conference room at her children's school. Her daughter Vanessa who had just returned from SOA and a board member went with her to speak with the teachers about the program and the organization. From that they had 8 youth apply for the scholarships and 4 were selected. She asked the teachers to not restrict the announcement but open it up to all the classes. They were to go to the April SOA but it was cancelled. They had insurance for the flights but the airlines wouldn't switch the names of the youth. While on a Zoom call with chapter presidents the Chattanooga president told her how to switch the names of the youth who were scheduled to go for the names of those who could use the flights the next year. She says that Zoom calls with the presidents have been of great help to her, far more so than with the phone conference calls.

Donations: The sister-in-law of the past president donates between \$3,000 - 4,000/ year. Chrissi also sends appeal letters to others who have donated in the past.

Ideas for the future: She wants to have a known speaker for the awards banquet.



**Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge
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