

Report on the North Workshop
Saturday, April 22, 2017
Espanola, New Mexico

On Saturday, April 22, 2017 we held the 2017 North Workshop for the Northeast and Northwest Districts at the Northern New Mexico Community Arts Center in Espanola. The Workshop was co-sponsored by the Espanola Valley and Santa Fe Chapters, and we thank their Chapter Presidents Judy Vickrey and Bill Britton for all their work in putting it together. It was great to gather together to learn, and to share information and experiences. We had 19 attendees representing various chapters, and including our Federation and District featured speakers.

The presenters and presentations were as follows:

Federation President Lorna Howerton

Lorna presented information regarding Federation and National NARFE changes. Statistical highlights included:

- Latest statistics show 2,106 total members in our Federation
- Of the 2,106: 1,529 are Chapter-based members and 577 are National NARFE members
- We lost 10 members since Dec. 2016, but we also received some new ones, for a net gain of 2
- About 40% of the members accept electronic communications
- The rate of non-renewal of memberships declined from 36% in 2015 to 29% in 2016, but appears to be heading back towards 36%. Therefore, Chapters should try to reduce this through better outreach. They can distribute the VOICES Magazine, and stress that members should use automatic dues withholding from their annuities, which can be done through a form available on the narfe.org website and in the National NARFE Magazine.

At the 2018 National Convention, the attendees will vote the finalized changes resulting from the 2016 National Convention regarding “one person, one vote” and “optional chapter membership.” Our Federation will follow up thereafter on the necessary Federation- and Chapter-level changes. Chapters should use the draft of the Federation By-laws in revising their Chapter By-laws.

Our Region VII Vice President Rodney Adelman has shared that our Federation receives 10% of the funding for National-only members, which must be kept separate from our Chapter funding. Therefore, it’s very important to have an active, effective Service Officer.

There are election options available to Federations regarding the new requirement to offer voting to all members. For example, they can use the Election Buddy site, which is similar to Survey Monkey but does have a slight cost. Or they can use the US Mail, or other options. For struggling Federations, the National Planning Committee is looking at options to help them continue in operation.

In the question/answer session following the presentation, there was a discussion about the merits/requirements of individual members actively contacting their Senators/Representatives vs. NARFE Officers contacting them. The conclusion was that individual members are welcome and encouraged to contact them about issues of importance and indicate their NARFE membership, but only NARFE Officers are authorized to contact them on behalf of NARFE as a formal organization. Also, Lorna explained that the NARFE National Executive Board (NEB) is working on ideas of how Federations can be re-structured to better meet our legislative mission. The NEB will have a new concept by May 21, and their working notes are posted on the NARFE National Website.

By-Laws Committee Member and Taos Chapter Pres. Sharron Flaherty

Sharron represented the Federation By-Laws Committee members (one from each of the four Regions, plus one Federation member), and took the place of NW District VP Billie Zinter as the presenter, because Billie was called away by a family obligation and unable to attend the Workshop. Sharron presented the following about By-laws changes:

The major changes from the 2016 National Convention were: “One person, one vote” instead of proportional voting based on the number of Chapter members; and Optional chapter membership instead of automatic membership, e.g., people will join the National organization and then be offered the option of joining their local Chapter. She summarized the work of the By-Laws Committee in putting together a framework for revising the Federation By-Laws based on the National By-Laws changes. The Committee will be happy to work with individual Chapters in helping them and reviewing their proposed Chapter By-laws changes.

In the ensuing lively discussion, several points were brought out:

- there may need to guarantee a secret ballot, which may present challenges to implement;
- it may be necessary to change the official name of the Federation from “The New Mexico Federation of Chapters” since Chapter membership is no longer required. This may entail some costs and time required to change legal documents on file with the State of New Mexico and other public entities; and,
- there is a need to establish just how much funding we will receive from the National organization for National members residing within New Mexico.

Sharron concluded with an appeal for members to send any suggested changes in the proposed Federation By-laws to the By-Laws Committee.

Federation Vice President for Legislation Sharon Reese

Sharon explained the importance of the membership and officers such as the SLs/CDLs and Chapter Legislative VPS becoming active in making our voices heard to our representatives in Washington, DC. She encouraged us to access the VOICES Magazine On-Line and the NARFE Website, especially the Legislative Action Center, to keep current on the important legislative issues that may affect our benefits. We can also call the US Capitol at Tel. 1-866-220-0044 and tell them our Zip Code if we don't know our

legislators' names and they will connect us with the correct office we are seeking. On the NARFE Website's Legislative Action Center we can either add our contact information to a pre-written email on various subjects, or we can customize the email or write our own individual email. We're encouraged to customize or write our own emails because they will get more attention than the form emails. It's especially effective if we add our own story(ies) of how we and/or our families are personally affected by the legislation.

Sharon then summarized the recent Legislative Conference in Washington, DC held in March 2017 that she and Lorna Howerton attended. Lorna joined in with her observations. Both stressed that the Conference was very productive despite snowy weather that delayed some Senators and Representatives or prevented them from returning to DC at all. All of the New Mexico Congressional Delegation met with Sharon and Lorna with the exception of Rep. Steve Pearce (e.g., Lujan, Lujan-Grisham, Heinrich, and Udall). All were supportive of NARFE's issues and cordial in receiving Sharon and Lorna. Sharon shared that any knowledge we have of the particular background and interests of the legislators is extremely helpful in building effective relationships with them.

Finally, we discussed the proper chain of reporting any contacts or interactions with the legislators or their staffs:

Members to the Chapter VP for Legislation to the CDL/SL to Federation Legislative VP Sharon Reese to the National Executive Board.

NE District Vice President Mark Mickelsen

Mark made a brief presentation about the importance of NARFE-PAC. NARFE-PAC is the only means by which NARFE can make direct campaign contributions to congressional legislators or candidates who support NARFE's legislative agenda. NARFE-PAC is extremely vital to NARFE's success in defending Federal employee and retiree benefits. NARFE-PAC contributions are voluntary and completely separate from other NARFE funds. There are several ways in which NARFE members may contribute to NARFE-PAC:

- A sustaining NARFE-PAC membership, which start for as little as a recurring contribution of \$10 per month. This can be executed on-line on the NARFE Website and is the preferred method. It's easy, convenient, and NARFE can budget these NARFE-PAC funds because the cash flow is predictable.
- A single or one-time contribution. This can be collected at a NARFE Chapter Meeting or other NARFE gathering, in which case there is a standard reporting form to be filled out and sent in listing the contribution(s). Such contributions can be made at any time and at multiple times in the year.
- A NARFE-PAC fundraiser. There are strict rules governing these types of contributions, including when they may be made, how they should be handled, and how they must be reported. Instructions can be found on the NARFE website.

NARFE National Headquarters has a NARFE-PAC Board that determines which elected officials or candidates are to receive NARFE-PAC contributions. The Board is made up of two elected National Officers and the Legislative Director. However, they also encourage Federations to make recommendations of worthy officials or candidates in their local areas.

In the first quarter of 2017-2018, our New Mexico Federation had 70 NARFE-PAC contributors, including 17 NARFE-PAC Sustaining members from various Chapters around the state. We should encourage our chapters to support NARFE-PAC, including having NARFE-PAC Chairs. In our Northwest and Northeast Chapters only McKinley County Chapter (NW) and Santa Fe Chapter (NE) have official NARFE-PAC Chairs. NARFE-PAC is extremely important to the effectiveness of NARFE and should be widely supported by our members.

Lorna Howerton and Mark Mickelsen

Lorna and Mark made a presentation from an outline provided by Federation Vice President for Membership Nancy Brunson, who was unable to attend due to some last-minute health challenges. Lorna covered the statistics Nancy had prepared:

- The 2016 Recruiting Content netted 1,070 members. In addition, Steven Singleton of Las Cruces was the Grand Prize Winner. He donated the value of the prize to the NARFE-FEEA Disaster and Scholarship Funds on behalf of the Las Cruces Chapter 182.
- NARFE's total national membership at the end of March 2017 was 214,049, a decrease of 773 members since February 2017. While the 2017 membership decrease was a regrettable 2,083, it was still an improvement over the 2016 figure of 2,956. While the death rate is decreasing, we are losing members due to non-renewals of membership, or from being dropped for not paying chapter dues. This increases the need for outreach to such members.

Mark then covered the rest of Nancy's outline as follows:

- We can learn from how other organizations incentivize people to join and remain active in their organizations. Even though NARFE has a unique mission that may not allow us to entirely copy their tactics, we can appreciate their efforts and perhaps find adaptations that work for us:
 - The Rotary Club specifies that new members must be recommended by a current member in order to join, and they conduct Open Houses with refreshments to attract interest.
 - AARP offers discounts on various services and for multi-year renewals.
- Although our purpose differs from those of the above organizations, one common denominator with them is using advertising and promotion by "word of mouth."
- We continue to find some success as well as challenges as we continue to participate in the annual FEHB Open Season Health Fairs in the Fall. During the Fairs, please note the email addresses of the Human Resources (HR) Offices. You can provide them with notices throughout the year on upcoming NARFE Webinars on retirement issues. Paying for a Webinar entitles the person to receive a free one year NARFE membership. In addition, you can continue to provide these offices current NARFE Magazines and brochures.

Nancy provided some ideas in her outline for improving recruitment and retention, and we opened the discussion to audience ideas as well. Here were the major ideas either presented or discussed:

- Use personal contacts at former work offices or clubs to get in the door at facilities;
- Keep in contact with your members at least once a year via phone calls or letters/emails. Ask what they would like to see your Chapter do;
- Every military base has an in-house news organ (newspaper, newsletter, etc.) in which you can advertise NARFE;
- Use bulletin boards (such as at Senior or Recreation Centers) and other public advertisements. You can also give posters to agencies or military bases;
- Write letters to the editor in your local paper;
- Make better use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.);
- Arrange evening get-togethers with legislative staffers or Human Resource personnel;
- Host recruitment luncheons or evening receptions for Federal employees;
- Invite interesting guest speakers to Chapter meetings;
- Contract Human Resource representatives to keep them informed. Give them materials, establish ongoing relationships, and follow up with them on issues and arrangements;
- Make presentations to employee professional groups like Federally Employed Women, Blacks in Government, etc.;
- Arrange to place the NARFE Magazine in the periodical reading section of your local library. Carry some copies in your car to distribute if the opportunity arises;
- Allow National members in communications at in Federation elected and appointed positions. Ensure they have access to Chapter Service Officers;
- Consider an orientation for new Chapter members. Give them opportunities to serve on committees or in leadership roles in the Chapter;
- Chapter leaders should solicit input from members on how they are doing and any suggestions they have for improving the operations of the Chapter;
- If your Chapter doesn't have its own newsletter, consider putting out a quarterly postcard that publicizes programs and events for the upcoming quarter. Or use a "Telephone Tree" to notify and remind members of meetings and special events; and,
- Be ready to tell Federal retirees or employees you know about NARFE and how NARFE fights to protect their benefits, including what threats those benefits are currently under. Let them know they need NARFE and NARFE needs them!

Additional Items and Conclusion

We also reminded attendees of the upcoming Region VII Conference from June 29-July 1, 2017 in Denver, and that the Tucumcari Chapter will sponsor the 2018 Federation Convention. The Workshop ended at approximately 4:00 pm with participants gathering for some group photos to record the moment before dispersing. The Workshop was well received, and participants expressed their appreciation for the topics and the efforts of the Workshop organizers and presenters.