

NATIONAL OFFICERS



NATIONAL PRESIDENT
CAPT G. Mark Hardy III, USN
E-mail: g.mark.hardy@usnr.org

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE VP
CAPT Lance R. Mauro, SC, USN
E-mail: lance.mauro@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-LEGISLATION & EDUCATION
CAPT Paul A. Denham, USN
E-mail: paul.denham@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CAPT William A. Emslie, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: bill.emslie@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-MEMBER SERVICES
CDR Kevin C. Hayes, USN
E-mail: kevin.hayes@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-MEMBERSHIP
CAPT James J. Parker, USN
E-mail: jj.parker@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-BUDGET & FINANCE
CAPT Douglas H. McDonald, SC, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: doug.mcdonald@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-SURFACE RESERVE PROGRAMS
CAPT Lawrence E. Weill, USN
E-mail: larry.weill@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-AIR RESERVE PROGRAMS
CAPT John F. Farr, USN (Ret)
E-mail: john.farr@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-ACTIVE DUTY PROGRAMS
CDR Aaron G. Bresnahan, USN
E-mail: aaron.bresnahan@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-ENLISTED PROGRAMS
YNCS Ralph H. Hensley, USN
E-mail: ralph.hensley@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-LEGAL AFFAIRS
LCDR Marc J. Soss, SC, USN
E-mail: marc.soss@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-HEALTH PROGRAMS
CDR Marian Cioe, NC, USN
E-mail: marian.cioe@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-RETIRED PERSONNEL
LCDR David M. Bradley, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.bradley@usnr.org

NATIONAL VP-JUNIOR OFFICERS
LCDR Steven L. Rogers, USN
E-mail: steven.rogers@usnr.org

NATIONAL TREASURER
DKCM Charles E. Bradley, USN (Ret)
E-mail: charles.bradley@usnr.org

NATIONAL CHAPLAIN
LT Matthew C. Fuhrman, CHC, USN
E-mail: matthew.fuhrman@usnr.org

NATIONAL HISTORIAN
CAPT David L. Woods, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: david.woods@usnr.org

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN
CDR Leo Hill, USNR (Ret)
E-mail: leo.hill@usnr.org

NATIONAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
LCDR Joyce Zongrone, USN
E-mail: joyce.zongrone@usnr.org

President's Message

Carpe Diem

All of us are familiar with the Latin maxim to “seize the day.” It is an encouragement to make the most of what we have while we still have it. In these uncertain times, many of us would probably like to “seize yesterday” and change some decisions. Unfortunately, that’s not an option.

In business school, I came up with a rather unconventional definition of profit. Stop for a moment and think of your own. Chances are it has something to do with making more money than you spend. Well, mine was nonfinancial. I defined profit as “predicting the future more accurately than others, and acting upon it.”

Rather strange at first sight, but if you think about it, those who accurately predict the direction of the economy, or real estate prices, or what product will sell and which won’t, achieve a profit. More importantly, we can extend this concept of profit to other situations, including nonprofit organizations (such as our own.)

The rate of change in our world is accelerating and poses a constant challenge to those who would accurately predict its direction. One thing is almost certain, and that is the future will not be a repeat of the past. This is difficult, because the behaviors and the models that created success in the past are not going to work anymore. We can long for “the good old days,” but the future belongs to those who predict it, and act upon it.

Shakespeare knew that truth over 400 years ago when he wrote*:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.

We face such a time now. Without aligning ourselves to the future, we will “lose our ventures.” I’ve reviewed our final 2008 numbers, and we’re sinking quickly. In 2002, we consumed \$105,235 from our investment account to cover operating expenses. Last year, we withdrew \$429,856. We’ve experienced 49 straight months of declining paid membership. Our 1950’s business model is not working in the 21st century.

To achieve success, we have to do more than declare our current strategy and operations inadequate; we must articulate how a new approach will achieve sustainable and meaningful objectives. There are 22 associations that represent various segments of the Navy; no one organization (yet) has achieved a unity of purpose to represent ALL Sailors. That is our opportunity, and our challenge. We are benchmarking highly successful associations such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association (IAVA), which has grown from 0 to 160,000 members in five years. We’re going to get it right because we have to get it right.

General Patton urged, “A good plan violently executed now is better than a perfect plan executed next week.” We now have a plan, but more importantly, the due diligence we went through in developing it has caused us to think things through much more thoroughly. Eisenhower agreed when he said, “Plans are nothing; planning is everything.” (Can you tell I studied at the Army War College?) Okay, how about Admiral David Farragut, “Damn the torpedoes; full speed ahead!” These great military leaders all knew that standing still was fatal. The time to engage the future is now.

Our Transition Committee has made significant progress in defining the actions we must take to complete our transformation to the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN). My preference was to let them work all summer and present a completed “business plan” at the fall conference. Our numbers dictate that we can’t wait that long.

One year ago, our EXCOM approved a resolution to become AUSN. Last fall, our membership voted to do business as AUSN, which allowed Headquarters to proceed with the necessary planning. This month, I’m directing the Executive Committee to introduce resolutions that will move us toward a financially viable organization and permit our Fall Conference to become the first official AUSN Conference.

Please read CAPT Loren Page’s article on page 7. I’ve instructed the Transition Committee to post their work on the Web at <http://ausn.us>. Take a look, and come to Fort Worth if you can to be part of our future. As always, feel free to write and let me know what you think.

G. Mark Hardy
National President

* - Julius Caesar Act IV, scene 3, 218-224

PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS

IMMEDIATE PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENT
CAPT Walter K. Steiner, USN (Ret)

PAST NATIONAL PRESIDENTS
CDR Joseph Quagliano, Jr, USN (Ret)
CAPT John E. Lindell, USN (Ret)
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RADM James J. Carey, USNR (Ret)
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CAPT Fred D. Carl, USNR (Ret)
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