

RVP III 1ST QUARTER, 2023 ARTICLE

I hope you and your family had a safe and enjoyable holiday season. Now, it's time to "get back into the groove" of performing NARFE-related actions, i.e., recruiting new members, engaging current members, reinstating lapsed members, participating in grassroots advocacy, and an array of other actions.

When I received my gold NARFE name tag from HQ several days ago, reality hit me that I'm now your Regional Vice President and that I've got some mighty big shoes to fill. Clarence Robinson was the best and set the bar very high during his tenure as RVP. In my opinion, Region III was and is the best region in NARFE (I may be a little prejudiced) and my goal is to keep it the best! With your support, we can continue to move Region III and NARFE forward. That's not to say there will not be numerous challenges. But we must look at those challenges as opportunities to grow and to do things better and more efficiently.

Newly elected National President William Shackelford has yet to lay out his goals and objectives for NARFE for 2023-2024 nor has the new National Executive Board (NEB) met. We had an "onboarding" session and were installed via Zoom on December 8, 2022. I anticipate the NEB meeting in the not-too-distant future. However, on several occasions, President Shackelford's number one comment has been "***we need solutions not excuses.***" I could not agree more. In addition to the new National President, there are six other new members of the NEB who bring a wealth of experience: three have served on the NARFE Bylaws Committee, two on the Advocacy Committee, and one on the Membership Committee. Thus, limiting the learning curve relative to NARFE bylaws, membership, and advocacy. Rather than continue the trend of pushing the "can down the road," the NEB will be reactive and offer viable solutions to some of NARFE's many issues. As I like to say, "It's a NEW DAY!" It's no longer business as usual.

Region III is comprised of over 130 chapters, 18,500 members (almost equal chapter and national-only members). Florida is the largest Federation and Puerto Rico the smallest. However, it is not the size of the Federation that makes the difference, it is the members and the great work they do for NARFE. Also, what works in one federation may not work in another federation because each is unique. It is the esprit de corps of the members that makes the difference.

Just prior to the holidays, I was perusing several articles and one caught my eye. It was entitled: ***Pink Goldfish: The 5 Factors That Influence Growth***, by Stan Phelps, a customer experience and engagement expert. It is about the factors that influence growth of the most popular aquarium fish in the world. Of course, I think of goldfish as

being yellow/gold, not pink. You might ask what do goldfish and NARFE have in common. The article stressed the importance of understanding and embracing "difference" and how taking advantage of being different can be used to grow an organization. The five factors affecting the growth of a goldfish are the same ones that drive the growth of an organization.

- **Size of Bowl** - How big is the market we serve? NARFE has the potential to grow big enough to serve the entire market. Remember, there are **5,530,183** federal employees, postal employees, and civilian annuitants; yet less than **143,000** are NARFE members.
- **The Total Number of Goldfish in the Bowl** - The more fish in the bowl, the harder it is for them to grow. Remember, we are competing against other organizations, such as AARP, Rotary Club, Lions Club, for attention, mindshare, dollars.
- **Quality of Their Water** - The nutrients in the water and the clarity of the water directly impact the size of the goldfish; the more nutrients they get and the clearer the water, the bigger the fish. How are outside forces such as the economy impacting NARFE's ability to bring in revenue from sponsors and new members?
- **Their First Four Months** - Goldfish are tiny when they are born, and they have hundreds of brothers and sisters. Many survive and thrive, while others do not. Does NARFE have all the necessary processes in place to keep our organization growing for the long-term?
- **Genetic Makeup** - What separates one goldfish from the others in the bowl? What makes NARFE stand out from other organizations that offer similar services? Remember, NARFE is the only organization totally dedicated to protecting the health and benefits of federal employees. These differentiators play a major role in NARFE's continued growth!

Some of the above factors we have some control. We don't have much control over the number of competitors or the size of the overall market we are in. We can control those things that make NARFE stand out; thus, better allowing us to better engage our audience. We need to take advantage of NARFE's numerous legislative accomplishments thru the years and make prospective members aware of them. Some examples of NARFE's accomplishments include: 1) Legislation allowing surviving spouses' annuities; 2) Legislation extending FEHB Program to retired federal workers; 3) Passage of law allowing Survivors' Benefits for new spouses; 4) Major player in the design of FERS; 5) Instrumental in getting FERS employees credit for unused sick leave toward retirement. NARFE continues to advocate for WEP Repeal. Use these accomplishments and others to promote NARFE.

COVID-19 appears poised in a variety of forms to remain with us on a long-term basis. Thus, we still don't know what the new normal is or will be. We can all do our part to ensure our members feel safe at NARFE meetings. Some chapters have not returned to in-person meetings for a variety of reasons. If that is the case for your chapter, I encourage you to at least conduct virtual meetings. Why do I say that? We need to ensure that our members stay connected because "absence doesn't make the heart grow fonder for NARFE."

I'm looking forward to working with each of you and TOGETHER, WE CAN MOVE NARFE FORWARD! I would love to hear your suggestions how we can do this. Please send me a text at 478-951-3260 or an e-mail at lynn.harper@msn.com and let me know your suggestions.

Thanks again for putting your trust in me by electing me as your Regional Vice President.

Lynn J. Harper

Region III Vice President