

## **TRADEWELL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

**Thank you!**

**Thank you so very much for this great honor.**

**There are a number of people I owe a huge thank you to ... and it all begins with Sharon—my best friend, buddy, soul mate, lover and wife of 43 years ... as of next Thursday. Thank you, honey, Happy Anniversary and Happy Birthday.**

**To my sons Tom Junior and Gary ... daughters-in-law Chris and Gail ... and five grandchildren—Andrew, Matthew, Scotty, Lauren and Payton.**

**To my Post in Milwaukee ... Gross Yaksh Post 6498.**

**To District 5 ... the Department of Wisconsin ... its award-winning state honor guard ... the Big Ten Conference ... and my extended VFW family throughout the United States and the world.**

**To my installing officer who has been with me every step of the way ... Past Commander-in-Chief Wally Hogan.**

**To all of our Past Commanders-in-Chief for the groundwork that you laid over the past 110 years. Your leadership served to make the VFW *THE GREATEST COMBAT VETERANS ORGANIZATION IN THE WORLD!***

**To the VFW Ladies Auxiliary ... thank you so much for electing Jan Tittle as your new National President. I could not have handpicked a better choice.**

**I am positive that as a team we will accomplish everything that can be done for our organization ... our communities ... for our military, veterans and their families.**

**To the National Staff ... it's been a tough few months, but I just want you to know how much your continued service to our great organization is appreciated and needed.**

**There are many more individuals I need to thank. I will just say thank you to all who have mentored and supported me over the years.**

**I am truly proud to have served on the Lisicki-Gardner-Tradewell team ... and the Gardner-Tradewell-Eubank team.**

**Because of the tough challenges we faced and the changes we made together, I believe the new Tradewell-Eubank-DeNoyer team is better prepared to face the future.**

**The theme for this year is “Honoring Our Military Heroes.”**

**To me, this is more than just a slogan or a motto.**

**This theme is about who we are and what we do on a daily basis in all of our Posts, Districts, Departments, and at our National Headquarters in Kansas City and the Washington Office.**

**To “Honor Our Military Heroes” is to ensure that our military and our veterans are honored, recognized and**

**cared for ... which is the focus of every program we conduct at every level of this great organization.**

**Last November we invited 13 current war vets to Kansas City. They had many good ideas on how to recruit and retain new members in the VFW, primarily at the Post level, which is exactly where my theme of “Honoring Our Military Heroes” has to begin.**

**I ask each of you today to go back to your communities and seek out those Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, because they will be the main force of this organization in the not so distant future.**

**I also ask you to seek out the many other veterans from other wars and conflicts who are eligible to join our great organization—but don’t just shove a membership application in their hand and expect them to join.**

**First we must explain to them who we are ... what we do ... and who we do it for.**

**I ask you to explain our legacy ... our story that goes back to the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection. This was the first time our nation deployed large numbers of American troops to fight on foreign soil.**

**Tell them about our forefathers who returned home to a government that bore no responsibility to care for their injuries ... their rehabilitation ... or their families.**

**And then I ask you to tell them that it was the VFW who changed the way this country treats her veterans ... treats her service members ... and treats all of our families.**

**Every Quality of Life program military members and their families enjoy today is because of the advocacy efforts of the VFW.**

**Every benefit that veterans and their families now receive is because of the VFW.**

**The fact that there even is a Department of Veterans Affairs is because of the VFW.**

**The VFW is the largest organization of combat veterans in the country. At 110 years young next month, we are also the oldest major veterans' organization in the country.**

**Comrades ... everything that we do is for somebody else. That is the VFW legacy ... and that is a recruiting pitch.**

**Wanting to be part of a legacy is why our youth continue to enlist and re-enlist in our military ... even after eight years of constant war.**

**Today's 18-year-old high school graduate was in the 5th Grade when 9/11 happened. Let me repeat that ... they were in the 5th Grade.**

**To them, their country has always been at war ... yet they still enlist to do their part as citizens of the greatest country on Earth.**

**They join our military during a time of war because it is the legacy of what Americans do.**

**The VFW legacy of service to others is the recruiting pitch we need in order to get them to join us ... but they have to want to join ... not be pressured into it.**

**We must show them what the VFW does for veterans ...  
for service members ... and for their families.**

**If you pressure them into joining, they will be gone in a  
year. But if you get them interested, you will have them  
for a lifetime.**

**My primary goal this year is to increase membership,  
which over the past five years shrunk by 300,000  
members ... from 1.8 million to 1.5 million.**

**That loss of membership also corresponds to a  
significant reduction in the number of Posts over the  
same five-year period -- from 8,600 to 7,900.**

**Membership is the key to everything the VFW does ...  
and my primary goal to increase membership applies to  
Posts as well as the Member-at-Large program ...**

**which allows veterans to join us because they believe in what we do for America.**

**We cannot raise money for worthwhile community projects, Operation Uplink, student scholarships or our Unmet Needs program without membership.**

**We cannot donate millions of volunteer hours in our communities without membership.**

**We cannot open doors in Congress without membership ... and we will no longer be able to call ourselves the largest organization of combat veterans without a strong, effective and involved membership.**

**I guarantee you the National Office and your Departments are very concerned with the current state of affairs.**

**It's no secret that the reason some Departments are in tough financial shape today is because of the loss of members and their dues over the past few years ... and trust me when I say that VFW everywhere is feeling the pain of lost revenue.**

**Membership recruiting is not something that everyone can or will do, so I ask that you properly recognize those few recruiters who do the grunt work.**

**I also ask that everyone support my new membership goal. I am asking everyone to recruit or reinstate 5 new members either at the Post level or as Members-at-Large.**

**Every VFW member is valuable for your commitment and expertise ... membership recruiting just increases your value.**

**Aside from enhancing membership, the VFW has other challenges.**

**We have also been hit by the nationwide financial crisis, but I predict we will emerge stronger ... because that's how great organizations tackle challenges ... they get better.**

**Just this past year, our 980 VFW-certified Service Officers helped almost 95,000 veterans to recoup more than \$1.2 billion dollars in earned compensation and pension.**

**Our service work helps to fill a nationwide need, comrades ... and with a new generation of warriors returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan ... the need for VFW assistance is not going away ... and nor is our willingness to get involved.**

**Look at VFW Post 7779 in Hyde Park, Vermont. They led a community fundraising event to rebuild a home for Army PFC Andrew Park, who came home paralyzed from a roadside bomb in Afghanistan.**

**VFW nationwide donates more than \$66 million dollars to help thousands of worthwhile community projects every year.**

**Navy Reserve wife Rianne Toll received a new roof— thanks to VFW Illinois District 16 Commander Robert Mcleod. He was able to quickly work an UnMet Needs grant after an emergency situation occurred while her husband was deployed.**

**Rianne now joins almost 1,900 other military families who have received a total of \$2.7 million dollars in help from Unmet Needs since 2004.**

**VFW California member Tom Burford raised and donated \$10,000 dollars to Operation Uplink in honor of his best friend's son —Corporal Nicholas Olson—who died of an IED explosion in Iraq.**

**Tom's donation helps to continue a valuable program that since 1996 has distributed more than 11 million free phone cards to deployed personnel and those recuperating from their wounds.**

**And to the memory of Marine Corps PFC Chance Phelps, who died in combat in Iraq in 2004 ... and whose homecoming was immortalized in the recent HBO movie called, "*Taking Chance.*"**

**In the movie—as in real life—VFW Post 10056 was the centerpiece of the town of Dubois, Wyoming ... and we**

**should all be extremely proud how the VFW was portrayed.**

**Communication is an important facet of any great organization, and it is no different with ours. As leaders, we must always keep an eye out for good stories and tell those stories to others.**

**I also hope that every Department, District and Post commander visits the VFW website weekly. It is a tremendous resource and administrative tool for those who take advantage of its features.**

**As you help spread our legacy, tell people about our tremendous legislative victories on Capitol Hill.**

**Tell them that it was the VFW that led the way for a new GI Bill for the 21st Century ... that it was the VFW that championed the new Traumatic Injury Insurance**

**program for today's service members ... and that VFW continues to be at the forefront of new legislation to improve mental health programs, increase VA healthcare funding, and assist family caregivers of our wounded.**

**This new generation of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans must be made aware that the VFW is first and foremost a veterans' service organization ... and we need to be there to answer their questions on what VA programs are available ... and where to go for claims assistance.**

**The new generation needs to know that America's veterans ... every service member ... and all of their families need a strong voice in Washington ... and that, comrades, is the voice of 2.1 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and our Auxiliaries.**

**I also ask that you keep and display a positive attitude at all times. Confidence breeds confidence ... and right now, that is what our nation needs.**

**We have many people out there looking for positive images to follow. Every one of us must be that positive image—a beacon of hope—because better times are ahead.**

**Comrades, our nation has been at war for almost eight years. It's a war that continues to impact every community in every state and territory ... wherever there are military men and women serving in uniform ... and wherever there are anxious family members who await their safe return. Yet, like all wars, these, too, will end some day.**

**We who have been there must ensure that there is a strong and vibrant VFW to welcome home a new**

**generation of warriors ... and to properly thank them for doing their duty as citizens of our great country.**

**And as we welcome them home, we need to ensure that they know that our military and VA medical care is second to none because the VFW continues to fight for proper funding and increased services.**

**That the benefits our veterans and uniformed personnel enjoy today exist because the VFW fought for them in the past ... and will continue to lead the fight today and far into the future.**

**And that our missing servicemen from all of our wars are being returned home to their loved ones because the VFW leaves no man or woman behind.**

**Comrades, that is our legacy. Please pass it on.**

**A strong and vibrant VFW needs to be there to welcome home a new generation of warriors ... to shake their hand ... to look them in the eye ... and to say thank you for your service, for your commitment, and for your sacrifice.**

**Someone has to be there to say, “*Welcome home.*” That someone has to be the VFW.**

**I thank you again for this great honor ... and may God continue to bless our troops, their families, and the United States of America. Thank you.**

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