

Grand Presidents Message



As I write my first Grand President's message, I feel the honor, duty and responsibility of this office and I understand the trust that you, my Brothers, have placed in me. I hope that I shall become a worthy link in that illustrious chain which has preceded me.

A few years ago, I spoke to Grand Parlor about pride in our order, pride in the spirit of '49 and the Native Sons, but also the hope that our descendants will be proud of our efforts, in our time. I implored the delegates that year to treat the mighty deeds of our predecessors as an excuse for failing to do what must be done.

With few exceptions over the last several decades, we have been content to listen to excuses, avoiding examination of the complicated set of changes that has weakened the Native Sons relevance to our contemporary lives. We are too caught up in our own politics, internal strife and dissension to honestly analyze and address the serious problems facing us. For too long have too many sat on the sidelines, giving voice to ideas, but never having the courage to step forward and take these ideas from the abstract to the here and now. Too long have lesser men allowed our great order dwindle for lack of honest self-evaluation and vision. Too long has our reliance on our past deeds inhibited today's Native Sons from achieving contemporary significance.

The reality is that change is the only constant and we have done very little to keep pace. For example, communications with technology has exploded yet only recently have we begun to utilize it to our advantage and are arguably well behind the curve compared to other fraternal organizations. Too often we cling to habits of the past; not our traditions, history and ritual, but rather to mundane practices that do nothing to promote our aims and objectives, but instead hurt them. It would be very easy to continue as we have over the last few decades; to ignore change and dismiss it as a

byproduct of the times, but it is not without its impact. Even today, we think of “loss of membership” as the major problem when in fact it is only a symptom of the underlying issue.

In order to move forward, we must address our problems which I contend are threefold: 1) loss of our Native Sons identity as an observable and enviable way of life; 2) lack of a vested interest in the Native Sons that makes the fraternity relevant to our busy, contemporary lifestyles; and 3) involvement in our communities.

As Native Sons, we take our order’s identity for granted and we have allowed the general public to forget how important we are to the fabric of society. In order to promote our identity, we must acknowledge some difficult truths. We must recognize that much of the general public does not know we still exist, what our purposes are and perhaps more importantly that many current Native Sons do not understand the true meaning of our Order. We are generally not visible in the daily life of our communities and there is little reserve of the positive memories of Native Sons.

Does this mean we do not support and provide invaluable services to the public? No, but we forget that what we do for each other, our parlors and ourselves enriches the quality of life for our families and communities and more importantly we forget to “toot our own horns”. Think of your own parlor or district for a moment. How many scout troops, little league teams, charitable organizations, scholarship recipients and others would suffer if we were not there to lead the way and support their efforts with our time and money? There is a reluctance to be self-aggrandizing, but if we do not sing our own praises, who will?

Next, we must determine our desired image of the Native Sons. We must reassert our dedication to preservation of California’s history; we must establish the relevance of Native Sons values to today’s life; we must re-establish the Native Sons as an elite, serious fraternity dedicated to leadership in and improvement of our communities and State; and we should not forget that we must provide a camaraderie and trust in a dedicated brotherhood. Above all, each member must strive to be easily identified in

his community by his actions and words as a native son, dedicated to the aforementioned principles.

We are in a downward cycle and membership is at its lowest point in the last 90 years. People are busy and joining is no longer fashionable. What we have failed to accept is that the world is a different place than it was. If you live in a city, your 15 minute commute to work is now an hour, if you are lucky. Family time is squeezed into evenings and children have their own activities. Technology provides entertainment and activities that compete with ours. All of this means that if our order wishes to attract and retain members, we must offer something of great interest to be even considered worthwhile.

When our Order was strong, there was no television, no radio and certainly no internet. In the evenings, when people returned home from work, there were things to do, some of which were in the category of drudgery, but more often than not the evening brought dinner and that was all. That left our predecessors with free time that was afforded fewer distractions than modern life offers, or perhaps even inflicts. Basically people had a choice of staying in their homes in the evening or going somewhere and being with like-minded friends.

We must recognize that we have individually and collectively allowed our lethargy to tarnish the jewel of the Native Sons. Our focus on the distant past has blinded us to the challenges of the present and it is the present we must address. Each of us has a responsibility to steward our order into the future, calling on our own spirit rather than resting on our laurels.

We must begin to tap the wealth of resources we have, both on a state level and within each of our own parlors. We must leverage the assets we have in our 7,744 members, our good name for preservation of California history, our legacy of charity, our community relationships, our facilities, financial assets, past grand presidents and our young and enthusiastic members. Our skills and resources are great, but our tools are

rusty. The work on the Native Sons public image begins with work on ourselves and individual parlors.

This year the goals and objectives committee laid out some very innovative and aggressive goals for our order this year. To that end, in addition to rewarding membership gains with belt buckles and honor parlor awards, members and parlors will be rewarded with implementing any of the objectives outlined in the goals and objectives report or for developing new and creative ways to promote, preserve and advance our beloved order!

I would ask each Subordinate Parlor to:

1. Plan meaningful activities that put Native Sons values into action. Consider how you can make each and every activity uniquely Native Sons and develop activities that involve the families of the brothers and the community at large.
2. Improve the environment of a parlor based fellowship. Refresh the image, welcome new members, provide mentoring and strengthen communication.
3. Tap the talents of individual members to build a community of experts to help the Native Sons and our communities; then reach out to your communities to offer that assistance!
4. Offer Native Sons recognition and incentive programs for actions above and beyond that of a knife and fork member.
5. Share your success stories with other Parlors!

Brothers, we must put aside old habits of saying, ‘oh, we tried that already” or “that’s the way we’ve always done it” or “yes, but”. Cast off the negativity and turn your objections into a challenge to develop a solution! Share your ideas and take ownership of restoring the identity of the Native Sons through each and every action, regardless of how small. Make the Native Sons the fraternity you want, brother by brother, parlor by parlor.

I do not propose that we neglect our history or forsake our mission and legacy, but brothers, it is time to adapt and if we do not define the vision of our order for ourselves,

others will do it for us and we will fade into obscurity as has been the fate of many other fraternal organizations.