

2019 INSTALLATION SPEECH

(These remarks were shared by 2019 National President Larry Cassell at the Installation Banquet in Hampton in January.)

I stand before this esteemed group tonight, proud beyond description. Not so much that I am the president, though I am honored that you have placed your trust in me for such a position. No, I am proud and privileged to know that I have the opportunity to work side by side with people that make a difference in the lives of others. Each of you sitting here tonight makes a difference. This is so important in an America that sometimes appears pessimistic. This is a time that America needs more organizations like Ruritan.

Now, I know that when addressing such an esteemed group, I must be careful not to be misinterpreted. We all may say things that come out differently than intended. For example, newspapers can do this with their headlines, like:

- **Something Went Wrong In Jet Crash, Expert Says**
- **Police Began Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers**
- **Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges**
- **New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Group**
- **Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft**

My intent tonight is to communicate clearly why we must step up and face the challenges today and in the future, namely retaining, recruiting, and regaining membership so that Ruritan can continue to be the leading community service organization in America. Our future relies on the power of determination by each and every one of us. I want to share a true story about an individual who overcame astronomical obstacles to attain the unthinkable.

A little country schoolhouse was heated by an old fashioned pot-bellied stove. A little boy had the task each day to start the fire and warm the room before the others arrived. One morning they arrived to find the schoolhouse engulfed in flames. The little boy was dragged unconscious from the building. He had major burns over half his body. At the hospital the doctor told the parents that he was likely to die.

The brave boy didn't want to die, making up his mind to survive. To everyone's surprise, he did survive. However, he heard the doctor tell his parents that due to the seriousness of his injuries, he would be crippled for the remainder of his life. Not accepting this prognosis, the boy was determined to walk. He was released from the hospital with no feeling or control of his legs, confined to a wheelchair.

One day after being wheeled into the yard, he threw himself from the chair and pulled himself across the grass, reaching the picket fence. He raised himself up holding on to the fence stakes, dragging himself along the fence. He started to do this each day. With persistence and determination, he did develop the ability to stand, then to walk, and then to run, running to school every day and then in college joining the track team.

In 1938, the scene was Madison Square Garden. This determined young man, Dr. Glenn Cunningham, ran the world's fastest indoor mile.

What a lesson regarding determination! I have determination to make us strong. I am more determined than ever before to make Ruritan buck the current trend of the decline in membership in service organizations, stepping up to continue the great traditions established by Ruritans these past 90 years.

Another example of determination to make a difference is reflected in your 2019 First Lady's desire to bring attention to a need, helping those more vulnerable than most. Nelda, come forward to share some words of what has brought great joy to us.

First Lady Nelda Cassell:

After only a moment of thought I have chosen as my project the theme of "adoption awareness." This is my project because 50% of our grandchildren are adopted. And if not for a note with a phone number, that percentage may have been higher. (Watch a future RURITAN magazine for more information on this.)

*If you have an adoption story you would be willing to share, please contact us. Fifty years ago Julie Andrews had her "hills alive with the sound of music." I love it when my **halls** are alive with the sound of noise from my boys!*

Grandchildren have brought us much joy and I have learned to appreciate how children look at life in a more innocent manner. Their perspectives are refreshing. Kids do say "the darndest things." But they have so much to offer. I came across some actual notes some children wrote to God as part of a Sunday school lesson:

- Dear God, I went to a wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay? – Neil
- Dear God, I am an American. What are you? – Robert
- Dear God, Thank you for my baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy. – Joyce
- Dear God, If you watch church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes. – Mickey
- Dear God, If you give me a lamp like Aladdin, I will give you anything you want except my money or my chess set. – Raphael
- Dear God, Please send Dennis Clark to a different camp this year. – Peter.

Such honesty and openness! We could learn from children.

Yes, we have challenges facing us. However we have the skills to take control and get on a positive path. I suggest we consider the strategies noted by Dr. Sharon Esonis in her book entitled, "It's Your Little Red Wagon." Some may remember my use of a little red wagon in workshop at a previous convention. I brought the wagon with me this weekend as a reminder. Dr. Esonis compared life to a little red wagon, an exciting vehicle that transports our hopes, dreams, promises, and passion. The following six core strengths can empower us to get our little red wagon on a positive path to success.

1. **Optimism** – Believe you are a powerful force in the future. If you assume there is no hope, I can guarantee you there will be no hope. We have a choice. As Victor Hugo state, "There is nothing like a dream to create the future."
2. **Courage** – Face fears, take risks. If no one took risks, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine Chapel floor. If you don't go after what you want, you'll never have it. If you don't ask, the answer is always no. If you don't step forward, you'll always be in the same place.
3. **Persistence** – Develop patience, discipline and endurance. Set a goal, commit to a course of action and make necessary sacrifices. Overcome obstacles, mistakes,

setbacks, failures, criticism, all the while maintaining the focus, motivation, energy and faith. In the confrontation between stream and rock, the stream always wins, not through strength but by perseverance.

4. **Enthusiasm** – Get excited, very excited. Do what needs to be done. Do not wait for others to get the ball rolling. Without dreams there would be no vision. Helen Keller, the blind and deaf activist, was asked, “Is there anything worse than being blind?” She answered, “Yes, a man with sight but no vision.”
5. **Living in the Present** – Give yourself this gift. I do this on the golf course. Success in golf is made more likely by focusing on only the shot you are preparing to hit. Thinking about past or future shots is decidedly counter-productive. (*I wish I could say this has helped my golf game – NOT.*) Losers live in the past. Winners learn from the past and enjoy working in the present toward the future.
6. **Resilience** – Bounce back from adversity. What better lesson about resilience than the story of Anne Frank as she wrote in her diary, “I have often been downcast, but never in despair. I regard our hiding as a dangerous adventure, romantic and interesting at the same time. In my diary I treat all the privations as amusing. I have made up my mind to lead a very different life from other girls and, later on, different from ordinary housewives. My start has been so very full of interest and that’s why I laugh at the humorous side of the most dangerous moments.

As a Chinese proverb noted, you cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.

Have you ever thought why rearview mirrors in vehicles are so small and the windshields are so large? It’s because where you are headed is much more important than where you have been.

Where are we headed? What can we do to reverse the trend of lost membership and clubs? How can we better serve our communities that have changed so dramatically in the past 20-30 years?

Together we can face the challenges that lie ahead. I alone do not have all the answers. However, there is such a wealth of experience and knowledge sitting in this room, and with the thousands of members who were unable to be here tonight. Let’s work together to make a difference.

We can’t change the direction of the wind, but we can adjust our sails to always reach our destination

Ruritans, it is time to adjust our sails. It will necessitate retaining and recruiting members so we can regain our membership numbers, work diligently with struggling clubs to prevent them from disbanding, encouraging effective leaders to step up, and have the commitment to address current and future needs of our citizens within our communities and neighboring areas.

At this past June’s Ruritan Leadership Conference I shared the **Three C’s of Life: Choices, Chances, and Changes**. We must make a choice to take a chance or our future will never change.

2019 is a year that we can stand tall making choices that will allow us to face challenges. We are making and will continue to make a difference.

THE BROWN BAG LESSON

Now it's time to find out about those brown lunch bags on your table. As a retired teacher/principal I cannot pass up the opportunity to be a teacher again. I am going to model a lesson for you called the "brown bag show and tell." On each table there is a packet of 10 brown bags, one for each person at the table. For my show and tell it is time to share with you items that will set the tone for 2019. Pass around the bags and each take one.

OPEN!

First you will find a Ruritan button, with our Ruritan logo surrounded by starfish. The button states "Making a Difference." Ruritans do make a difference. We should never become complacent and give up. Wear the button with pride.

The starfish story is on the back of the enclosed note card. If you are unfamiliar with this story, take a moment later to read it. The story reinforces the need to come to the aide of others. Inside the notecard, Nelda and I want to express to each of you how much your service is valued.

Why a Life Saver? Do not take lightly what Ruritan does within our communities. Imagine what life would be like without Ruritans coming to the aide of others. We make a difference in the lives of many. Yes, we are life savers.

Finally, my business card has been included. With the support of the 2019 Ruritan National Board and the efficient and dedicated Ruritan National Office Staff, we are just a call or email away to assist. I enclosed my card so you can share with me proven strategies to enhance the presence of Ruritan within a community. I will, in turn, share these strategies with all of you. Together we can make a difference.

As the late Stephen Hawking said, "Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet."

God bless each and every one of you and the United States of America.