

Good evening my fellow Ruritans. What a different world it is. After two years of a roller coaster ride for everyone, and a near death experience for me, everything about the message I had planned on bringing to you has changed.

Lying in hospital bed on my stomach just trying to get another breath it came so clear to me what I needed to say.

You elected me to be your President and leader of this great organization in Kingsport, TN. Most of you know very little about me other than what you have learned in short time we have known each other. Therefore, I am sharing my background so you will know your President.

About your new President

I grew up in Rural Southwestern Virginia. My family was poor and very pessimistic. I was the opposite: optimistic. I always saw good in everything and an opportunity in the future. In elementary school I had a goal in life that I never shared with my family. They would not have understood. I wanted to change people's lives, so in my mind my personal goal was to give one million dollars away. I thought I understood the value of money, for we had very little. So, I set my sights on how I was going to accomplish this. I was the first to go to college in my family and I was paying for it myself, so I set out to get the most for my buck. I wanted to become a doctor, for I saw that they had money. I would go to the dean and get permission to take extra classes. I worked all the time when not studying. I majored in biology, chemistry, and math with minor in psychology. I didn't have the best advisors. Anyway, I got on the waiting list for medical school but didn't get in. Linda and I had met and dated all through school. We got married and found out we had a baby on the way three months later so that changed my goal. Being a father had become my most important thing.

At the time, the best money to made was in the coal mine and Linda's father helped me get a job. I always had a high aptitude for the mechanical side of things, so they kept me mostly as helper in maintenance. After a year everyone was required to go for safety training. While at the training center, I asked about getting into the electrical training program. They informed me classes weren't being taught because of the economy and coal was down. I persisted and asked for the books, which they willingly gave to me.

Two weeks later I was back at their door wanting to know how I could take the tests. They informed me I couldn't. "Why not?" because I didn't have the math classes. I asked about the fact that I was a math major, so they told me to get my transcripts, which I did. When they looked at my transcripts, they realized I had taken everything they taught plus a lot more. They signed off for me and I took the federal tests for "underground and above" for low, medium, and high voltage electrical. I finished my test before everyone else and I saw there were only 20 more questions for in the foreman's test, so I took it also.

The next day I took my electrical certificates to the superintendent. He asked why I didn't take the foreman's test? I said I did. He wanted it also. So, I went from being a helper to being a foreman by simply testing out. There are folks today who will say that it can't be done. I am telling you anything is possible by working and setting your goal.

The coal industry went on a downward spiral and being the newest on the roster, I was laid off. So, I decided to change my direction in life.

I was introduced, by a friend, to the financial world. So off I went to the library to find everything I could about it. I joined a company and about two years later I was vice president and moved my family to Minnesota. There I built an agency of 300 people with five vice presidents reporting to me. I have never completely left that work behind – doing a little every now and then.

But big changes were going on at the time, so I was becoming frustrated.

A good friend convinced me that I should join him to build a company he was with. Everything was going well but being lax and not having a contract signed before we started caused our 20 percent of the company to evaporate even after we turned them from a struggling company to a very successful company. From there a couple friends and I bought, sold, and built companies.

At that point I decided to move my family back to the mountains and went to work for a sales company, becoming a regional manager for them. A job without all the headaches! I even declined their offer to move to Ft. Worth to be General Manager.

I was able to get the small family farm that I grew up on where I tore the old house down and built Linda a new one. We bought more acreage and today we have about 400 acres and run around 100 head of commercial black angus cattle: cows, calves and four bulls.

So, why have I brought this up? Now you know my background. When I take on a project, I want it to be a success and the best.

What are we going to do to put Ruritan on the top?

I believe in a team and all working toward a common goal. Our slogan is One Team, One Direction: UP.

I attended the Community Service Leaders Conference in Florida mid-November. My goal was to find the magic bullet to put Ruritan on top. I learned a lot but also found disappointments. The organizations that are growing are offshore and in other countries where folks are hungry for community. All the organizations concentrated in the United States are struggling. A lot are selling their assets and downsizing, a sign of an organization, or company, dying. There was no magic bullet. Why?

We have become very satisfied and complacent in our country. We are a country of plenty. That does not mean that our communities don't have a need for our services. They only need to hear about what we can do to help them become a better place to live and work.

We are at a critical point in our organization. If we don't change what we are doing, we will not exist as you know us today. So, it is up to us. I am not telling you anything that you don't already know. We cannot continue to lose clubs and be successful. Even the age of our membership is creeping up on us. We are not invincible.

The answer for our success is no different than it was when our organization was founded. Our founders saw there was a need. They identified communities that had the need. They introduced themselves and ideas to the leaders of the community. Together the leaders of the community and the Ruritan organizer built a club. Did all the clubs they form become a success? The answer is no. Did that stop them from continuing? Again, the answer is no.

You elected me to lead. Together we will make Ruritan the greatest community service organization there ever has been.

Our goal for 2022 is to form 160 clubs.

Take a deep breath and get over the shock. This is really a very low goal. There are 41 districts and areas in our organization. That is only four clubs per district and area to be created. We have lost this number in the last few years.

I know this can be accomplished and more. Please erase from your mind that you have to hold their hand for five years. Our founders never held their hands. I can assure you that the cream will come to the top. You are leaders here. Let's go together and lead.

I would like for each of you to stand and address your neighbor (spoken to the attendees at the 2022 Installation Banquet). Please say: "I am on the TEAM, and WE will SUCCEED." You may be seated.

One of my favorite Bible chapters is Luke 19, verses 11 thru 26 - the parable of the ten minas. I am going to paraphrase. Christ was talking about a very harsh man who was going to be king. The man called ten of his servants and gave each a sum of money to take care of. When he returned as King, he called each servant back. He asks the first servant how his money had grown. The servant replied it had grown by tenfold. He put him in charge of ten cities.

He asks the second servant the same and he replied it had grown fivefold and he put him in charge of five cities. He called the third servant and the servant replied that he had put the money in a sack and kept it because he feared the harsh man. The king replied since he knew he was a harsh man, "why didn't you at least deposit it and let it earn Interest?" He took the money away from him and gave it to the first servant. The crowd replied but doesn't he have enough? He replied, "isn't it true that those who have more get more, and those who have little soon lose even that." This parable is not about money but about stewardship.

Thank you for your trust in me.

We are ONE TEAM, ONE DIRECTION: UP!