



## Chapter Presidents Zoom Call

October 11, 2024 | 3 pm ET.

**Chapters Represented** –Dallas, Greater Cincinnati, Pensacola, Sacramento, and San Diego

**Special Guests** –John Meko, President; David Harmer, National Director; Sally Brinton, Board Member; Larry Brasher Chapters & Partners Committee Member; and Woody Woodmansee, Union League and Chapter & Partners Committee Member.

### Welcome

Carolyn Santangelo, Sr. Director of Chapter & Partner Relations, welcomed everyone on the call and thanked participants for joining a call on a Friday afternoon. Carolyn introduced Founding Forward President, John Meko to give some updates from headquarters.

### Updates from National

John Meko informed everyone that a new strategic plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees in September. This is a seven-year plan and it's a bold plan. The plan contains \$43 million slated for investments into the Valley Forge Campus and \$100 million slated for programs. We are going to greatly expanded our student and teacher programs. The plan is broken down by students, teachers, and community. We will have a meeting to go into the details of the plan, but Mr. Meko provided some highlights.

- We will connect via a trail the Valley Forge Campus with Valley Forge National Historical Park. Students will be able to walk from campus to George Washington's headquarters. This will take a couple of years, but all the right people are on board with the plan.
- We will be taking Good Citizen Day on the road. This will start in 2025 with a pilot program in the Sacramento Chapter. We hope to expand this to several other chapters in 2026.

The question was asked about how we plan to pay for the campus improvements and program expansion. Mr. Meko said the answer is everywhere. Every penny raised from now on will be included towards our goal. We have started the campaign at the start of this fiscal year and have already raised \$20 million. People are looking for answers to what is happening in our country now and Founding Forward and our work is the answer. We will outline all of this in detail at our next



meeting. The public announcement on our strategic plan will probably happen in February so chapters will be getting the details well in advance.

Mr. Meko also made note that Founding Forward will be hosting a joint event with the Friends of the Medal of Honor Grove on Saturday, December 14<sup>th</sup>. It will be Wreaths Across the Grove which is in association with Wreaths Across America. We are planning a large ceremony, placing of the wreaths at each obelisk in the Grove plus all the monuments on campus followed by refreshments. We will be promoting this event and hope to get some press coverage. Larry Brasher from Sacramento mentioned that they are participating with some of their students to lay wreaths at the gravesites on the same day. It might be nice to have other chapters organize a day of service for their students too through Wreaths Across America. We could get great press for all our chapters and national participating.

Carolyn agreed to help find locations near chapters. If you are interested in helping with Wreath Across America, please see the link below to search for volunteer opportunities near your chapter -

<https://www.wreathsacrossamerica.org/About/LocationAndGroupSearch>

### **Award Updates**

Carolyn reported that the awards materials will be sent out shortly. Especially to the chapters hosting ceremonies in November. We are waiting for one piece of the awards package before shipping everything out. Also, if you have not received a report on your essay submissions, they are still outstanding. We have had a major delay, but the results will be sent next week.

### **Spirit of America Updates**

Carolyn reported we still have some openings if you have not gotten in your dates. Please feel free to reserve those dates now with her or Deepak Bhagat in Education. Carolyn also reported that the registration process for students and chaperones is slightly different from previous years. The forms all remain the same, however the links to the registration pages are now private. Those links for your reserved dates are not front facing for the public. In the last email update, you received those links. We will continue to share with you and your education/youth VPs to ensure you have the proper information. Students should not go on the website and click on their date. That is just an application for those not sponsored by a chapter or partner. Finally, if you are thinking about doing extras with your students while attending Spirit of America like museums, and cheesesteaks please start letting us know as soon as possible so we can start making reservations for you.



## Graduate Program Updates

Carolyn was proud to announce the graduate seminar and workshop topics for 2025. This year our goal is to get 650 teachers to our programs. Last year we had 314. We are looking to more than double our teacher participants and will need your help to recruit teachers. We will have six weeklong seminars, three traveling workshops and four weekend summits on the Declaration of Independence. A flyer promoting the graduate programs will accompany these minutes.

- First Amendment Freedoms – June 15-20
- Examining Western Civilization – June 22-27
- The Constitutional Covenant – June 29-July 3
- History of Immigration – July 6-11
- Lafayette’s Revolutions: America & France – July 13-18
- Medal of Honor Legacy: War of Terror – July 27-August 1
- Virginia Presidents (Traveling) – June 28-July 3
- American Revolution: Middle States (Traveling) – July 6-11
- American Revolution: North (Traveling) – July 20-25
- Weekend Summits on the Declaration of Independence
  - January 17-19
  - June 27-29
  - July 11-13
  - July 18-20

There was discussion on the teacher programs and the cost to send a teacher. We are hoping in the future that chapters can focus on just providing travel stipends to teachers to encourage attendance and Founding Forward will cover tuition. If a chapter still wishes to help by sponsoring a teacher we will update you shortly on the cost of tuition. To help recruit teachers to attend, explain to teachers that our programs are immersive and heavy on content.

## Membership Best Practices

The topic of today’s meeting was “Membership”. Carolyn offered that perhaps the best way to start a conversation about membership is to define membership. What does membership mean in your chapter. What are the benefits members receive and what expectations do you put on your members. Carolyn opened the floor for discussion.

- Trasa Cobern of the Dallas Chapter began the discussion. She believes you must plan to get the members you want. Dallas currently has an older membership base, and they wish to increase membership within a younger demographic. One of the perks they are trying to increase membership is to



host a “Membership Levy” twice a year. Members are invited to a local restaurant with no cost to them. It’s a time to meet with leadership and give you input on matters related to the chapter and what you would like to see the chapter do. Membership dues in Dallas are \$25 for an individual and \$100 for a couple plus there are some VIP levels.

- Betty Williams from Pensacola reported that Pensacola does a “Meet and Greet” each year. The event is free to members, and they are asked to bring a guest who might be interested in joining. It is a chance for membership to catch up on what’s happening in the chapter and to also recruit new members. Pensacola currently has 50 members. The dues are \$30 for individuals and a special discount rate for students and teachers of \$25. The chapter has a great relationship with teachers. All teachers who attend a program at Founding Forward get an honorary membership to the chapter.
- Sally Brinton spoke on behalf of the Utah Chapter that does not have a membership. They have a strong working board that conducts their two main programs, find students and teachers to attend the programs, and seek donations. They run with a board and committee structure that has been very successful in getting things done.
- Chrissi Richards from the Tucson Chapter asked how each chapter works with conveying the message of non-partisanship to let people know that we are not political. The feedback along with telling them out right is to focus on our principles. Those principles are universal and not political. We transcend partisanship.
- Bob Stevens of Greater Cincinnati alerted all to Freedom Foundation, a very political non-union group that many are confusing with the old Freedoms Foundation. That could be an obstacle to membership in your area, especially with teachers. Place emphasis on that you are now Founding Forward.

### **Special Event Announcement**

John Meko announced that there will be a Chapter & Partners Conference in 2026 to coincide with the celebration of our nation’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday. The date has not yet been finalized though we are thinking about September. We are in the early stages of planning, but we hope to bring not only our chapters to town, but also involve our local Philadelphia partners and donors. We will have celebrations and working sessions. There will be no costs for chapter members to attend and we are hoping that we can get enough sponsors to offer travel stipends. Be on the lookout for more information as things come together.

Carolyn thanked everyone for joining and reminded people of all the good work we are doing and the impact we are making on the lives of so many. That is a top reason that people should want to become members.



Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 13th at 1pm ET. The topic will be the strategic plan. We will encourage you to invite others from your chapter's board to attend to this meeting to hear about the plan.

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