



United States Navy Public Affairs Alumni Association

SIGHTINGS

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December 2010

Board Elects New Slate of Officers: Steve Pietropaoli is New President

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At the December 2010 board of directors' meeting, a new slate of USNPAAA officers was elected. Steve Pietropaoli was elected President. John Carman and Jill Votaw were elected Vice Presidents and Jim Mitchell was elected Secretary. Mike Doubleday was reelected Treasurer and Brent Baker continues as Historian. Chris Baumann stays as Chaplain; Dick Thompson as Membership Chair, Bill Gengler as Sightings Editor and Alan Goldstein as Webmaster.

Following are brief background summaries of the four new officers:

RDML Steve Pietropaoli, USN (Ret) is Senior Director, CAPSTONE, at the National Defense University. He was a 1977 graduate of Cornell University, and was commissioned that year after attending Officer Candidate School in Newport.

In 1984, he became a 1650 specialist and his first PAO assignment was at the CHINFO news desk from 1984 to 1987. Then he spent a year in Graduate School at American University in Washington, D.C. before serving as Executive Assistant to CHINFO from 1988 to 1989.

He was then assigned as PAO for the Commander Second Fleet from 1989 to 1990, and followed up with a stint as media officer at CINCLANT/CINCLANTFLT from 1990 to 1992. The admiral then went back to CHINFO from 1992-1996 where he headed the news desk, and was Assistant CHINFO for Media Operations.

He attended the National War College and then served as Assistant for Public Affairs to the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff (1997- 2000).

He served as Chief of Information

RDML Steven Pietropaoli



from 2000 to 2003 before retiring and becoming National Executive Director of the U.S. Navy League, a position he held until October, 2010.

CAPT John Carman, USN (Ret) is Director of Communication at the Special Operations Command, Tampa, Florida. A 1975 graduate of the Naval Academy, he was commissioned directly as a 1650 PAO. His first duty stations included the

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View from the Bridge

Dear Members,

This is my last column, as my two-year tenure as USNPAAA President has come to an end. At its year-end meeting in December, the Board elected an excellent slate of officers and Board members for 2011.

I am very pleased to report that succeeding me as President is RDML Steve Pietropaoli, USN (Ret.), who served as Chief of Information 2000-2003.

I was able to quickly verify the dates of Steve's tenure as CHINFO by looking it up on the USNPAAA web site. Thanks to the fine work of Historian Brent Baker, we now have easy links to the history of the Navy public affairs program ("History") and the Navy Public Affairs Archive ("Archive") on our site: www.usnpaaa.org.

One of my goals has been to ensure that the history of Navy public affairs is properly documented, and we've made great strides forward, as our web site will attest.

Speaking of history, recent events once again reminded us of the importance of passing on the experiences and values of the Navy public affairs program from prior generations to the present.

On December 7, USNPAAA was proud to cosponsor a reception at the Navy Memorial commemorating the publication of Gumption, a memoir by RADM Bill Thompson of his life and times in the Navy and afterwards.

Admiral Thompson spoke humorously and movingly of his experiences as the first 1650 Chief of Information and later as president and builder of the Navy Memorial.

Eight days later, on December 15, 90-year-old CAPT Bob Mereness, the last surviving member

of the original group of 40 special duty public information officers selected in 1946 that became known colorfully as the "Forty Thieves," passed away. His obituary appears in this issue.

Admiral Thompson and Captain Mereness were among the pioneers of our program who helped set the high standards of professionalism and dedication to duty for those who followed, including those currently serving in Navy public affairs.

I'd like to thank our current officers and Board for their outstanding support during my tenure. They have served our Association well. Also a special thanks to RDML Denny Moynihan, current Chief of Information, and his predecessor, RDML Frank Thorp, for their support of the Association.

This year, for example, Association members participated with CHINFO personnel in two professional development events in Washington, with the Association obtaining speakers for one of them. I know that Steve Pietropaoli is enthusiastic about continued support of CHINFO.

Of course, USNPAAA was established primarily as a social organization, and we work hard at that. Reunion XIII in San Diego last February was great fun; arrangements are picking up speed for Reunion XIV in Norfolk on October 7-9 over the Columbus Day holiday weekend.

I'm pleased to report that thanks to the recovering economy, close budget oversight by former and current Treasurers Jeff Zakem and Mike Doubleday, respectively, and wise counsel from our Finance and Audit Committee headed by Jack Garrow, the Association's finances are in decent shape. Current assets are about \$107,400, compared to about \$99,000 at the end of 2008.

I have greatly valued to opportunity to reinforce old friendships and make new ones over past two years. Best wishes for a happy and healthy New Year, and I hope to see you in Norfolk in the fall!

-- Jim Noone

Capt Bob Mereness - Last of the 40 Thieves Passes at 90 Years - Services on January 15

The last of the 40 Thieves, Retired Captain Robert Mereness, passed away in Alexandria, VA at age 90 on December 15.

During World War II, CAPT Mereness served with the amphibious forces and participated in the invasions of Sicily and Salerno before becoming a training officer at the Navy's amphibious training base at Ft. Pierce, Florida. He later served in the Pacific, aboard amphibious attack transport ships.

In 1946, CAPT Mereness was selected as a public information specialist and assigned as one of the first 40 members of to the Navy Department Office of Public Relations (the "40 Thieves").

Later public affairs assignments included service on the staffs of the CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT in Hawaii. He also worked in the Information Offices of the Military Sea Transportation Service in London and the Naval Training Center and Eleventh Naval District in San Diego. He went back to the Atlantic where he served with CINCLANT and CINCLANTFLT and then the U.S. Naval Forces Europe in London.

CAPT Mereness also served as a public affairs officer with the Naval Air Task Forces during the Korean War, and was public affairs officer for the Atlantic Command during the Cuban Missile Crisis. His last assignment, before retirement in 1966, was with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

Following retirement from the Navy in 1966, he became assistant to the president of the Shipbuilders Council of America, and later executive director of the Asbestos Information Association of North America.

He established his own public relations firm

in 1982, and served as Director of Advertising and Corporate Relations for the Navy League of the United States during the subsequent five years.

CAPT Mereness was born in Marion, Ohio. He attended Denison University and graduated from Antioch College before his commissioning as an Ensign at Notre Dame University NROTC in 1942. He was a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College.

Bob was active in civic affairs for the city of Alexandria, VA, serving as a volunteer for the Boy Scouts of America and the National Capital United Way, and he was involved in various Navy public affairs activities.

He was a member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church of Alexandria, VA where he served as an Elder. He was also a member of the Navy League of the United States, the Retired Officers Association, and the Beta Theta Pi social fraternity.

Survivors include his wife, the former Kathleen Wharton, from McAllen, TX, their two sons James and Jeremy, his eldest son Robert C. of a previous marriage to Kathryn Carnes of Lima, OH, and his

granddaughter Melissa Monolo. His wife and three sons reside in Alexandria, VA, and his granddaughter is in Galivants Ferry, SC.



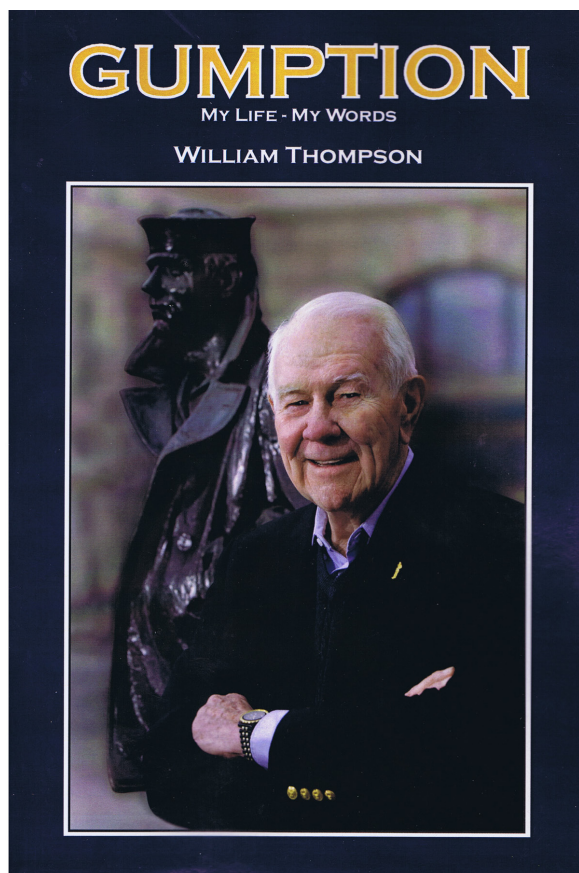
Services will be held 10 AM on Saturday, January 15, 2011 at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, VA. Inurnment will follow in the Spring at Arlington National Cemetery's columbarium.



Recent Sightings

Zum Has Gumption Too!

The Godfather of the Navy public affairs community originally wrote Gumption for his immediate family, but it is a wonderful read for anybody. It's the American story of a small town football player from Wisconsin and Michigan, who joined the Navy in 1942 to see the world, and ended up as the first public affairs specialist to make admiral and CHINFO. He also tells the tale of how he became founding President and CEO of the Naval Memorial. You can also read about the founding of the USNPAAA.



The name Gumption came from Bill's grandfather, who told 13-year old "Billy" he needed to have some gumption if he was to get anywhere. The style and tone of the narrative is vintage Bill Thompson. He looks the reader in the eye and it is direct and colorful with

lots of good sea stories. He gives unique insight into the major Navy leaders, public affairs personalities and issues of his day.

Some of the most exciting tales take place during the Korean War, when LTJG Bill takes the "conn" of the mighty USS MIDWAY (CVB - 41), and later LT Bill again has the "conn" on USS JOHN R. CRAIG (DD - 885) during a typhoon with 90-knot winds, and a man goes overboard.

The book is dedicated to "zum" better known as Dorothy: Navy Wife, Mother and Bill's partner for six decades. She is seen arriving by ship in Guam in 1947. She has baby daughter Stephanie (Stevie) in her arms, jumps into Bill's jeep to be delivered to her first Navy quarters - a sad looking World War II tin quonset hut. Another scene is in Coronado, CA. where Dorothy tells Bill at 2300 it's time to have their baby, and Bill calls the pier to ask that they hold the last ferry to San Diego, so she can deliver son Brian at Balboa Naval Hospital.

Clearly Bill and Dorothy lived and loved the Navy life, and are still at the top of their game. **Good news is that USNPAAA members can get a copy by just sending a check for \$6 (for shipping) to Mike Doubleday at 1805 Crystal Dr., #809, Arlington, VA 22202.**

McCandless Road Report

Road Reports, an automotive information and consulting firm, has been established by automotive industry communications executive John G. McCandless.

He is a retired Navy Reserve Captain and a USNPAAA life member who resides in Grosse Pointe Woods, MI. McCandless is widely known for his automotive insight and expertise. From 1990 until 2010, he was National Manager - Field Operations for Toyota's Corporate Communications Group.

McCandless says the firm will provide confidential consulting to domestic and international clients in the automotive industry. He is an expert in written and oral communication, and a frequent contributor to the Navy Memorial's blog, "The Navy Log".

He has been a guest lecturer at Michigan State University, The University of Michigan, University of Detroit - Mercy, Illinois Institute of Technology and the Naval War College. For more information you can call him at (313)-610-5600.

Beck Promoted to Admiral While in Afghanistan

Naval Reserve officer and Association member “Vic” Beck was recently promoted to Rear Admiral while on active duty and assigned to CHINFO. He is currently serving as Director of Public Affairs on the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

RDML Beck was commissioned in 1985 upon graduation from Officer Candidate School in Newport, R.I. His first shipboard tour was in the Engineering Department aboard USS Enterprise (CVN 65) where he qualified as a surface warfare officer.

He then completed a follow-on assignment as a navigator on the USS Richard E. Byrd (DDG 23) prior to attending the Department of Defense Information School in 1990.

During the next two years, Beck was the assistant director of the Navy Office of Information New England in Boston. He detached from active duty in 1992 and affiliated with the Navy Reserve Navy Office of Information (NR NAVINFO), New England.

The admiral has held various billets during his Reserve service, including operations officer with NR NAVINFO New England, public affairs officer for Navy Readiness Command Northeast, executive officer of NR NAVINFO New York, and director of the Naval War College Public Affairs Reserve Unit. He has also served as an individual mobilization augmentee at the U.S. Joint Forces Command and in the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Beck is currently mobilized and is serving as the Director of Public Affairs for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. He was previously mobilized from April 2007 to April 2008.

During this tour he was initially assigned to lead an International Media Engagement Team in Dubai. But, in August 2007, he transferred to Multi-National Force Iraq as the chief of Media Operations, serving in Baghdad during the surge of operations until April 2008.

An award-winning strategic communicator, in his civilian career Beck has held various positions of increasing responsibility in public relations, marketing, media relations and account management at public relations firms and corporations.

Beck’s military decorations include the Bronze

RDML Beck’s New Stripes



Star Medal, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal (two awards), the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (five awards), the Joint Service Achievement Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (four awards), and various service and campaign awards.

Member LCDR Van Ferguson Passed Away Earlier this Year

We have a report that Association member Van L. Ferguson died sometime in 2010. We are unable to get any direct information on his death.

LCDR Van L. Ferguson, USN (Ret) was an enlisted journalist during the Korean War, and then he went to OCS and later became a 1650 public affairs officer. In 1967, he was the PAO for Commander, Naval Base Subic Bay. During the Vietnam War, he was PAO for Commander Carrier Strike Force Seventh Fleet (1969-1970).

He was residing in Harlingen Texas at the time of his death.

Board Members (Continued)

and at CHINFO as Assistant PAO Detailer. He attended Graduate School at the University of Oklahoma and earned a Master's degree in Communications. From 1983 to 1990 CAPT Carman worked at CINCPACFLT, the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), the Office of Legislative Affairs and CHINFO.

Then he served as PAO, Commander Third Fleet (1990–1992); Office of Information, PAO Detailer (1992–1994); and Special Assistant for Public Affairs to the CNO (1994–1997).

Before retiring in 2003, he was CINCLANT PAO, and Chief of Public Information at the NATO Headquarters for Allied Transformation in Norfolk, from 1998 to 2003. He then went to work from 2003–2009 as Deputy Director for Strategic Communication at US Joint Forces Command in Norfolk

CAPT Jill Votaw, USNR (Ret) is presently a civilian employee at the Navy BRAC Program Management Office in San Diego. She began her naval service in 1976 by joining the first Naval Academy class to have women in it.

Commissioned on May 28, 1980, she served in various assignments and left active duty in February, 1991. She then joined the Naval Reserve, and was redesignated as a 1655 PAO in November 1991. She served as CO of five Reserve PA units and was recalled to active duty in Sept. 2007, serving as Chief of Public Affairs for the US Strategic Command in Omaha, NE.

Votaw retired in 2008, with a total of 32 years of uniformed service. Her civilian public affairs positions include Deputy PAO at the Naval Aviation Depot, NAS North Island and Deputy/Flag PAO for COMNAVBASE San Diego and the Navy Region Southwest. She also was PAO at the COMNAVREGION SW, Naval Base Point Loma.

CAPT Jim Mitchell, USN (Ret) is President, Strategic ConneX International, LCC, Alexandria, Virginia. He graduated from Michigan State University and was commissioned in 1969. During a 29-year Navy career he served as Deputy Chief of Information, CINCSOUTH Chief of Information and a spokesperson for NATO operations.

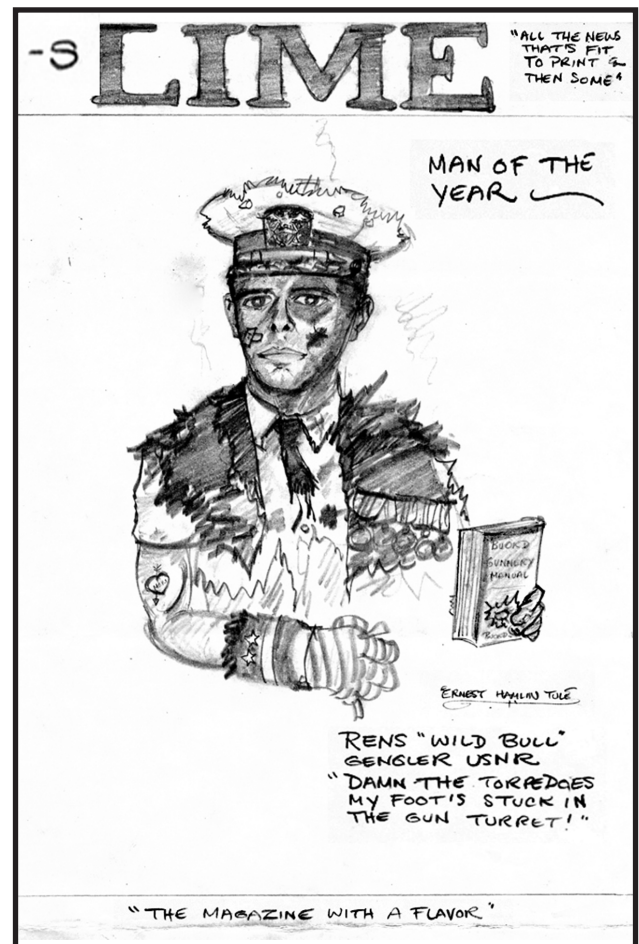
He was also Assistant Chief of Information (News Operations) from 1989 to 1991. He earned a Master's Degree in National Security Studies from the U.S. Naval War College.

His other public affairs assignments included: staff U.S. Pacific Fleet, the Trident ballistic missile

submarine force, Navy Recruiting, the U.S. Seventh Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces, Japan.

Upon retirement, he served in various civilian and federal government positions including director of public affairs for the Transportation Security Administration; Assistant Inspector General for Congressional and Public Affairs; Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority Inspector General (CPA-IG) in Iraq; and Director of Communications for the U.S. Special Counsel.

Your *Sightings* Editor Gengler Was Man of the Year in 1962



Although Board member and Sightings editor, CAPT Bill Gengler had many outstanding public affairs assignments during his 24 year career in the Navy, he only made a magazine or book cover one time. The level of respect staff had for him in his first assignment in an aviation squadron at McGuire AFB can only be captured by this (S)LIME magazine cover designed and published by Ernest Tule, a journalist-type guy who worked for him.

The 5 C's of Communications by McCurry

Change, in the worlds of geopolitics, politics, generations and information technology, was the broad topic of former White House Press Secretary Michael McCurry's comments at the October USNPAAA luncheon.

President Clinton's spokesman from December 1994 – August 1998, McCurry came to the White House after serving as spokesman for the Department of State from 1993, and as Chief Spokesman for Secretary Warren Christopher. He'd also served as Press Secretary for two Senators and for three presidential campaigns. He is now a partner at the government relations firm, Public Strategies Washington, Inc.

In opening, he noted: "It is that hour that I used to do the briefing at the White House, and I'm at a podium, and as far as I can see, Helen Thomas is nowhere around in the front row.

His remarks stimulated frequent laughter from the USNPAAA audience and covered a broad range of changes that are affecting our nation and the world, the role of communications, and the failure to communicate.

He said, "I'm going to give you my lament which I often call my Cool Hand Luke speech. You remember that scene in the Paul Newman movie where the jailer reaches over and grabs him and says, 'What we have here is a failure to communicate.'"

McCurry focused on "Five Cs:" Credibility: telling the truth is important; Candor: we have a hard time dealing with things that are screwed up; Clarity: don't need to dumb down info we have -- how do we make it easier to understand; Compassion: showing respect; too many are shouting past each other; Commitment: invest more in the communications function.

"I've thought about this challenge that we as communicators in trying to be coherent in the world in which we live. And, it's not easy. I worry about this, because I think it's had profound consequences that have really damaged our ability, which is so different in some ways but similar in the challenges we face today. Because, if you remember, think back to 1976, Jimmy Carter: he was wearing his nice cardigan sweater telling us to turn down the thermostat, because we didn't have a comprehensive national energy strategy that would keep us from being overly-

reliant on foreign sources of petroleum. He was in the process of creating a Department of Education, because we had an educational system not preparing our kids for the challenges they were going to face in the global economy, particularly in the critical areas of science, engineering, math and technology."

Admitting straying into his "partisan Democratic spiel," he observed, "Part of what I think is the trouble and the perplexing reality of politics today is that you think back to that glorious moment when Barack Obama ... when he took the oath of office as our President ... there was a sense that this country's about to do some pretty interesting things. The change that he promised is about to happen, maybe things are about to get a little bit better.

And, here we are two years later and I don't think that many folks would argue that we've risen to the challenges that we faced, that we tackled that unfinished business of serious work that is before our country and that things are, in fact, getting better for most of our fellow citizens."

Looking back many more years, to the years of the Cold War, he said, "If you think back ... some ironic ways began with the Cold War, which was an organizing principle for the world and for geopolitics." He observed that that when it ended, "We no longer had the Cold War to unify our society. The end of the Cold War unleashed some things that allowed us, in our country, to dumb down the political dialogue. This led to polarization and gridlock."

Jumping ahead to 9/11, he noted that little had changed: "9/11 helped us to summon up work together, but four months after 9/11, the Washington Post reported that partisan politics had returned to the Capitol; there were regular fights and little progress."

"My plea is we've got to do better than this. There is general change in our country, with real differences between those over and under the age of 50." Referring to "Generation Y," (those born between 1982 and 1994) he noted, "Millennials don't tend to be as partisan and ideological. They don't want to hear the stories of the glory days of old. They hope that baby boomers have been ushered off, stage right.

Turning to Technology, "In the 1970s, a personal digital assistant would have been a manicurist. So, we didn't have this constant flow of information. I

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Jack MacKercher Remembers Mereness as a Special Person

Bob Mereness was a special person to me. I spent more than two years with him and as a newbie 1650. He was exactly what I needed. Bob absolutely topped the list when it came to special events and community relations. He knew I had a strong background in media and gave me free reign in that area.

I'll never forget two instances that proved to me he could sell wet snow to Aleuts. Two people from National City came into our office one day. Their request was simple. They had just built a new bowling alley and wanted to place a couple of Navy and Marine recruiting posters in their place of business.

Before they left, Bob had gotten them to volunteer to lead a National City Salute to Navy Week. The event was a winner and included a parade, movie premier and raft of other activities. Fact was San Diego decided to do the same thing thanks to Bob.

Robert E. Lee was a local TV host of travel shows in and around Southern California. One day he came into the office to get permission to do a program on a ship visit in port. That day and that visit changed Bob Lee's life. For years afterward he strived to get a network series on Sea Power. He came close, but didn't bring it to life. But with Bob Mereness' encouragement, Bob Lee never gave up trying.

In a most personal event, I learned of my mother's passing very early one morning. I called Bob a little after first light and told him of this saddest of events. He told me he was busy which rather surprised me.

But, within an hour he called me back. He had 30 day leave papers for me. And, he had a plane ticket to Detroit, and some money to help me in my emergency, along with his promise to keep track of my wife Lee and our children while I was gone.

I'll miss Bob! He was my early mentor, a gentle man, a splendid 1650 and hid a heart of gold until someone needed it.



The Five C's (Continued)

think that's also plausibly part of the explanation about why things have unraveled a bit in our ability to be coherent. We don't have as we did in the 1970s those three major networks, two wire services, and a handful of major media. With social media we can now publish our own news. We are our own publishers." Recalling his time as Press Secretary, he said, "My job was to be a human piñata for the press corps."

"A share of even the national networks can still have 30-minute broadcasts," he noted. "They can only reach about 30 percent of the nation on any given evening. So our ability to summon that national audience to come to the camp fire to hear the stories, to hear Walter Cronkite go, 'That's the way it is.' We were all, in a sense, on one page together, as a country. That began to disappear, too."

Noting that the audience has fragmented across the Internet, with many multiple sources of information, he observed, "So, if all of that, in some ways, lent itself to the sense that there's not a functioning way in which we together come and debate and discuss, and bring people to the idea of one American sustained economic growth."

McCurry called for establishment of (1) A new ethic of communications – to restore true fairness and impartiality. (2) A new ethic of political discourse, with reasonable human behavior. (3) A new ethic of public service with citizenship that is participating; (4) A new ethic of public information; "spin" is part of the problem.

He concluded with an October 2001 quote from NY Times columnist Tom Friedman: "The terrorists refrain is that America is a country of wealth but no 'values' – that we have wealth and power but that we are basically a godless nation if not the enemies of God. What this view of America completely misses is that American power and wealth flow from a deep spiritual source – a spirit of respect for the individual, a spirit of tolerance for differences of faith or politics, a respect for freedom of thought as the necessary foundation for all creativity and a spirit of unity that encompasses all kinds of differences. Only a society with a deep spiritual energy, that welcomes immigrants and worships freedom, could constantly renew itself and its sources of power and wealth."

In closing he called this our "moment of awakening and revival."

Reported by Jim Mitchell