

## **President James F. Strojny, Jr.'s**

### **Testimonial Speech**

Past Grand Esteemed Lecturing Knight the Honorable Edward P. Volta, distinguished members on both sides of the head table, Past State Presidents of our Association, members and friends, as I stand before you tonight I am overwhelmed by the turnout, I must have done something right. I cannot believe that in just a few weeks my term of office as your State President will be coming to an end. It seems like just yesterday that I took the oath of office. My deepest gratitude goes out to all of the State officers, state chairpersons and district chairpersons, and to all of the lodge officers and members for making this year the success it has proven to be. I also wish to extend all the best to our next State President Don Dewar, in hopes he has an even greater year than our Association has had this year.

To my very close friend Danny DeGregorio PSP, I wish to thank him for the outstanding job he has done tonight as the General Chairman for the evening. And more importantly for his friendship and encouragement he has given to Mary and me over the years.

Once again, I would also like to thank Joseph P. Silvia, Jr, PGLIG and PSP, for being the Toastmaster for the evening. I wish to thank Joe for seeing the potential in me many years ago, and encouraging me to move on to further my career in our Association and in Elkdom. I would not be standing

here today, if it wasn't for his confidence that I could do the job. It is an honor to have Joe and his lovely wife Evelyn as cherished friends, both of whom have been so supportive of both Mary and I over the years and especially throughout my journey to becoming State President.

My appreciation goes out to the remaining members of tonight's committee who assisted and that would be Tony Piccolo, Jeff Hopkins and Tim Avelino.

A special thank you goes out to Karen Norton, for her exceptional job, as our hospitality hostess for this past year.

Altogether, this is the same team that put together our very successful GER Visit this past fall. I am proud of each of these dedicated Elks, who have taken time out of their busy schedules to make this evening run so smoothly. You all have once again, demonstrated that you all are the best.

Mary and I have been blessed to have all of you, to turn to for assistance and more importantly your friendships, to rely on during this past year.

I also want to express Mary and my thoughts and prayers to our Special Deputy Mike Zellen and his family on the loss of his Brother-in-Law out in Colorado and to Gail Falzone, wife of our 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Rich on her recent surgeries. I ask all of you here tonight to continue to keep both Gail and Rich in your prayers, so that one day soon, they will be back enjoying themselves with us all.

Also, to my very dear friend PER Bob Hinton could not be here tonight, as he has continued to have his ups and downs over the past couple of year's health wise, but I feel Bob and his wife Alice's present all the time.

And I wish to express my sincere sympathies and prayers to all the many Elks who have lost a loved one or who are unable to be with us tonight due to illness, I hope that by the grace of God, many of you will be at our convention in June.

I would now like to introduce to all of you, my family who are here with me tonight.

Unfortunately both my older children could not be here tonight. My daughter Erin, whose husband Ryan is an E-6 in the United States Coast Guard, along with my grandson Bryson, could not be in attendance tonight, as my son-in-law is preparing to take his Chief's exam. Also, I am proud to say they are preparing for the arrival of my second grandchild a baby girl in August.

My oldest son Zachary, who also could not be here tonight, as many of you know, is currently a Lance Corporal in the United States Marine Corps and is at present in training at Camp Geiger and then later this month he will be attending combat training at 29 Palms, in preparation for his deployment to Afghanistan in July.

They all are always, close to my heart and I couldn't be prouder as a father, of their continued devotion to

the safety and security of our country. And it is appropriate that my testimonial is being held on Armed Forces Day, as at this time, I wish to express my gratitude for the sacrifices that all members of our military and their families are making for us at this very moment.

I do have here with me today my youngest son, Tyler, who tells me, that even though I won't be State President much longer, that I will always be, State President to him, sorry Don.

Also here tonight, I have my Mother-in-law, Cathy Megna, along with my Brother and Sister-in-law Larry and Joan McLaughlin and their daughters and Chrissie and Kim. Along with Kim's boyfriend, Scott. All of whom have been extremely supportive of me, during my time as an Officer of our Association.

And tonight a very special couple is seated at my family table, and they are Tim Avelino and Nancy Kelly. Mary and I could not have asked for two finer people to call our friends. I cannot put to words my appreciation for the amount of time and effort that they both have given to ensure that this year, was going to be great for the both of us. I don't think I can ever repay them for all the support that they have given us over the years. I wish them all the best as they both begin their new duties in Elkdom and please be assured, Mary and I will be there for you both, as you have always been there for us.

And last but not least, want to introduce to you the First Lady of the Massachusetts Elks Association, my

lovely wife, Mary, who has been by my side as much as possible all year. I know that she has many times re-arranged her work and home schedule as best she could, to allow for me to try and meet all the commitments that come with being State President. It has been a challenge, as we both work full time and at the same time have a 7 year old at home. I know that it hasn't been easy, but I would not be standing here tonight, without her support.

I also, would like to acknowledge Jody Mahan, widow of our Past Grand Exalted Ruler Edward Mahan for taking the time out of her busy schedule to be here tonight and for her continued friendship. I had the privilege of being a District Deputy in 1995 during Ed and Jody's year as our Order's First Couple. It was an incredible year, and Jody, I want to let you know, that you and Ed will always hold a special place in my heart. Could my fellow members of the 1995-1996 District Deputy Class please stand for recognition at this time? Gentlemen thank you all for being here tonight; it means so much to me.

Speaking of District Deputies, where would I be without my cabbage patch? I could not have asked for nine finer Elks to share my year with. Many of them I have had the privilege of knowing and having served with on various State committees with for many years. I am honored to have had the opportunity to be called the King Cabbage. I look forward to sharing many more great times with you all in the future. It has been an honor.

I would like to thank my home lodge, the Taunton Lodge of Elks for all their support through the years and for being here tonight. And also, I wish to express thanks to my home District, the South District. I am truly appreciative for all of your efforts to make my year as President so special.

I would like to at this time pause and remember my parents Jim and Laretta Strojny. Sadly, I may not have been an Elk today, if my father had not passed away suddenly 28 years ago. I witnessed my first Elk Lodge of Sorrow at his wake. My father always told me the Elks would never forget you and no truer words could have been spoken than on that rainy January night when 15 Elks in Tuxedos showed up to perform their ritual honoring the passing of a fellow Elk. I stand as a witness today, to say to all of you, if you don't think our Lodge of Sorrow has a lasting effect on families, you are sadly mistaken. When I decided to get involved as an Elk Officer, one my biggest supporters was my Mother right up to her passing almost 12 years ago and I must say she was always overwhelmed by the way she was treated from the many Elks she met. Mom – Dad, I know you are both here looking down upon me tonight.

Being an only child, I don't have a large family, so I truly consider many of you here more than just Elks, you have become my extended family, some of you in one way or another have at times been; parents, brothers and/or sisters to me. Many of you over the last 28 years have seen me through some tough times and shared with me the many good times. For

this, I will always be grateful that I am an Elk. And I look forward to many more years of great fellowship.

Tonight, I am proud to share with you, the great year that we all have had as Elks from Massachusetts. We have a lot to be proud of as an Association. As I began to plan this year, our country and state were in an economical downfall – a depression of such proportion that had not been seen since 1929. And I said to myself, this is a great time to be a State President of a volunteer organization.

But you proved my uncertainties to be wrong. I can now tell you proudly, that we haven't cut back on our commitment to our Youth, our Seniors, our Communities, our Veterans or our Current Men and Women Serving today. In fact, as we unfortunately continue to witness our Federal; State; and Local governments having to still make major cuts in services. We as Elks, in many cases, have surpassed previous levels and in no case have we eliminated any services from our programs, due to the economic climate. Thanks to your efforts, I as State President have been able to witness the true meaning of being an Elk from Massachusetts. As our final reports and figures continue to come in; we have not allowed our present fiscal crisis prevent us from doing our best to prevail over the many cuts that have affected our communities.

It is a great time to be an Elk and each and every one of you should also be proud of the job you continue to do to ensure the services and principles

of our Order are constantly met. I congratulate each and ever one of you for the unrelenting job you are doing as Elks.

The only negative that I have seen this year, is that we once again will be facing a statewide decline in our membership ranks. We continue to do more with fewer members. But, we need to turn this trend around. Because as I see it, if we continue to lose members and eventually have to close lodges, I bluntly don't see any organizations on the horizon picking up the void we as Elks will leave behind.

Remember "*Pride is Contagious!*" Make sure you all go back to your lodges and "*blow our own horn*" about what we as Elks in Massachusetts are doing. And by continuing to do this, just maybe we can keep many of our members from failing to pay their dues; because of all they hear about what we and they as Elks really do.

Our very existence is dependent on first maintaining and then increasing our membership. To accomplish this, we need to concentrate on bringing in quality members, who are willing to get involved in our programs. It has been proven that just bringing in members who just want a place to hang out, is not the answer. Our continued drop in membership is a grave issue and we need to address it with all our resources, we need to have people join our ranks, who believe in what we are really all about, not just joining our Order for a place to get cheap drinks.

There are many people in our communities that would make quality members, but remember we need to constantly get the word out to them through a strong Public Relations campaign and then once we get them to become members, we need to immediately get them involved in Lodge activities, right from the day they are initiated.

My motto for this year has been something I truly believe about us.

***“Those who can, do.***

***Those who can do more, are called Elks”***

We all joined the Elks for various reasons, but once we came to know what Elkdom was really all about, each of us here tonight has remained an Elk because we want to make a positive difference in the lives of others less fortunate or to invest in our future through the many youth programs and scholarships we have or to honor our Veterans for their service to our country.

I can't emphasize enough, to each one of you here tonight, whether you're an Elk or a family member, be proud of what the Order of Elks provide and don't ever be afraid to enlighten others on just what the Elks offer. Make it clear to your friends, your neighbors and your communities that the Elks have never cut back on our commitment to help those in need, our investment in the future of our country or the honor we give to those who have given so much of themselves.

In closing, on behalf of Mary and myself, we wish to thank each and every one of you for your friendships that we have made through the years and especially the hospitality shown to us both this past year.

It has positively, been an honor and privilege for me to have served as your President this past year. I will paraphrase a saying by the late PGER Art Mayer.

“I am proud to say I’m an Elk, but I’m even prouder to say I’m an Elk from Massachusetts”.

I can’t help but think back to my indoctrination night, when it came to the part – Someday you could be Exalted Ruler of your Lodge, or a District Deputy or even a State President or just maybe Grand Exalted Ruler. As a new member coming in I said to myself, yeah – right. Well, 3 out of 4 ain’t too bad!

As I have always ended my comments as President, let’s pause and say a prayer for the Men and Women who tonight, are in harm’s way protecting our freedoms and to all our Veterans for all they have given; so that we are able to enjoy this evening together in peace.

And may God bless each and every one of you here tonight and all our fellow Massachusetts Elks and their families.