

Barbara J. McPherson, Grand Chancellor

2024 Keynote Address

Women of the Moose International Conference

New Orleans, Louisiana

Good morning! Welcome to New Orleans and the 112th Annual International Conference of the Women of the Moose. How many of you were in the Big Easy back in 1991 or even in 2018? According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, a hurricane hits New Orleans once every 7 to 11 years, making NOLA one of the most hurricane-prone cities in the United States. It's been 6 years since The Moose descended on the city.

New Orleans is especially vulnerable to hurricanes due to it being around 6 feet below sea level on average and having a generally weak infrastructure. Furthermore, New Orleans has seen the wetlands to its south disappear as a result of coastal erosion, leaving it even more susceptible to storm surge during a hurricane.

The hurricane season in New Orleans runs from early June through late November each year just as it does in Florida, with peak hurricane activity occurring in late August and early September. Don't worry, I checked the Hurricane Tracker and there is nothing in sight while we are here.

Hurricane Katrina, in 2005 was by far the most-deadly to hit New Orleans with Hurricane Ida as the second-most damaging and intense hurricane to make landfall in Louisiana on record, behind Katrina. Hurricane Ida hit in 2021.

The traditional school system was overhauled; some neighborhoods are still relatively empty; demographics have shifted; and startup businesses are rampant. But from 2010 to 2020, New Orleans' population grew by 12%, with growth skewed toward neighborhoods that flooded during Katrina, as residents continued to rebuild. Yet, according to the 2020 Census, New Orleans has only 79% of its pre-Katrina total population, with some neighborhoods shrinking and some growing. Are you making the connections between rebuilding and our organization?

We know that New Orleans has had to change to make the city safer from future storms and adapt to a decreased population with less tax dollars. I'm sure they have had to modernize as well while rebuilding. Like the growing pains we experienced with the unification of our organization, we had to adapt to make our fraternity stronger. We have modernized our membership structure and a committee at Moose International is conceptualizing new recognition programs to acknowledge members, regardless of gender, for their commitment and participation

beginning at the Lodge level. Like tasks that have indeed been challenging for the leaders and citizens of New Orleans, modifications to our organization have been laborious.

Traditions continue however as was evident when we visited New Orleans in February. We arrived to find many of the streets closed for Carnival. Each year, Carnival season begins on January 6 (or the Feast of the Epiphany in the Christian faith). Parades and celebrations are held daily throughout the various locations in New Orleans. The season then ends on Mardi Gras, which is always the day before Ash Wednesday. You may not have guessed it from the scenes of debauchery seen each year, but Mardi Gras is linked to a religious fast undertaken each Easter – Lent. Mardi Gras does indeed have a purpose – to celebrate one last time before giving up vices for Lent.

In the book *The Art of Gathering* they discuss traditional gatherings and why they continue to happen. Do they have a purpose? Is it meaningful and unforgettable for the attendee? I suppose Mardi Gras fits that description but what about today?

All of you are in attendance at this gathering, is it to learn about the Women of the Moose and all we do? Do you want to learn about our successful year? Maybe you're here to receive a degree and are required to attend. Well, that's ok but if that's you, what do you hope to gain from attendance at this meeting? I want this meeting to be meaningful and unforgettable for you. The same should be true for your Chapter meetings and each gathering you have at your Moose Home. Don't just plan it and forget it and hope it all works out.

So, if you're here to learn about our successful year, let's get started and maybe you can learn a little about the Women of the Moose at the same time.

Across our continent, we have donated the sum of \$1,648,021 to Moose Charities. This is a combination of all donations for the Moosehaven AAA Project, the Grand Regent's Project, our monthly commitments to projects on both the Mooseheart and Moosehaven Campuses and donations to the Endowment Fund.

Venice, Florida leads the way this year with donations totaling \$18,070.

Rounding out the top five donors to Moose Charities is Anna Maria Island, Florida with donations of \$16,267

South Norfolk, Virginia Chapter at \$14,712

Findlay, Ohio Chapter with \$13,453 and Hilliard, Ohio with total donations to Moose Charities of \$13,325.

In addition, many many other Chapters have donated over \$10,000. To each of you who have given to Moose Charities, please accept my heartfelt thanks. Let's give all of our Chapters a big hand for their total contributions!

In addition, the Women of the Moose have been heroes in their local community to the tune of \$6,306,569 in community service. What an outstanding contribution to those who count on volunteer assistance for their programs. Please give yourselves a big hand!

I sometimes think that our Chapters are sort of like sports teams where strategic adjustments made during a game are the difference between success and failure. Not adjusting, particularly when things aren't going well, almost guarantees a team and our Chapters will lose.

Life is a lot like that. We're constantly confronted with situations that require adjustments in the way we do things. What might have worked in the past no longer works, and a new method, way or technique is required.

When a new Board of Officers starts out the new year and maybe things aren't going just like they have for the last 50 years, a balance must be struck between rushing in to take over a task and allowing them to figure it out. My approach always has been to allow them to be as independent as possible for as long as possible but be there to guide them so they don't fail.

I would like to share some comments from a recent Chapter meeting. A meeting where the Chapter was struggling and ready to throw in the towel. The members said "the Women of the Moose needs to find a way to modernize the entire organization. There have been no major changes in over 20 years."

I'm not quite sure that any of the women making this comment were around 20 years ago. If they were, they just may have forgotten that at that time, we had 14 Chairmen, 6 Officers, 4 Appointed Officers, 8 escorts and a musician that sat on a very specific ritual floor in addition to 6 members of a Ritual Team.

They also suggested that we needed flexibility on the dress code. We would hope that our Officers would set a good example and represent the Women of the Moose in an acceptable manner. All members attending the meetings no longer need to wear dresses! At least we don't have to dress like this on a daily basis...

CLAN MACPHERSON VIDEO

Someone said to “get rid of the book!” Not sure if they mean the General Laws or the Meeting Procedures and Agendas. The General Laws are there to help protect our members from themselves and to ensure that our Chapters are in compliance with most state/provincial and federal rules regarding the operation of a 501 C 8 Not for Profit. Our Chapters are indeed actual businesses and not just a bunch of women getting together.

The Meeting Procedures and Agendas exist to make sure all business is conducted properly and to help the meetings run much smoother. Like we have here at our convention meetings, the Meeting Procedures and Agendas is a “podium book” for the officers and presenters. It keeps the Senior Regent on task and provides a scripted agenda for each meeting. If everyone is talking, interrupting and trying to talk over each other, it can become chaotic.

The suggestion was made that if someone qualified for a degree, they shouldn't be mandated to attend a Conference to receive the degree. To all of the Collegians and Stars in the room, should we just mail it to you? That was the suggestion of a member who is unable to be here this week. Remember our call cards are good forever. When a Pilgrim is called, he gets one chance and must attend the conferral at Mooseheart.

Someone also asked if we are unified, why have the Women of the Moose? If we did away with the Women of the Moose, we should rightfully do away with the Moose Legion as well and imagine how well that would go over? Think of all of the honors that would be lost and be mindful of all of the funding our beloved Mooseheart and Moosehaven would lose.

Finally, they stated that the College of Regents is not the same as Pilgrim. I agree. Some men serve this fraternity for decades and never become Pilgrims while our Collegians meet specific criteria and they receive their honor in as little as 3 years. They don't feel the College is treated the same. If a Pilgrim passes all Pilgrims come together but nothing for the Collegians. Does anyone bother to invite them? Perhaps the state/province needs to have a College Chairman or Higher Degree Chairman to celebrate the new degree holders and notify everyone when someone passes? Some of the support we provided as a Moose family in the past has been lost in the busy lifestyles of today's members. Connection and togetherness are part of our mission as Moose members. Tradition can commingle with a more modern approach.

Sounds to me like this Chapter doesn't know how to think outside the box and simply stopped trying. Unfortunately, they voted to close as did 57 other Chapters this past year. Eight of those Chapters were over 100 years old.

Have we simply forgotten how to have fun? Have we forgotten how to play nice in the sandbox or did we never learn? Maybe we're not having fun at our meetings. Or maybe we need to be a little more compassionate toward our fellow members. Our mission is so vitally important to today's society – helping those less fortunate!

On social media space, everyone's fighting and looking for something to fight about. Some of the social media pages created initially to bring members together are now filled with incorrect information, adamant opinions and bullying. I don't want anyone fighting in the Women of the Moose. Period.

Unfortunately, far too often, our Chapter members and Officers forget to say thank you to their volunteers or the Officers simply take them for granted. The members feel used and underappreciated and don't return.

Our Chapter Advocates have been conducting lots of special meetings with our Chapters, and their efforts have proven to be a true asset to the Women of the Moose. They work very closely with our office to ensure the future of our Chapters. Depending on the circumstances, an Official Visitor or "team of experts" will attend Chapter meetings to work with the members, suggest ideas for functions, assist with their current crisis and assist them in understanding and following our procedures.

Our thirteenth Chapter Advocate Seminar was held at our beloved Moosehaven following the Chili Cook-off. Our meeting included a joint meeting with the Membership Department Field Staff on Sunday.

While we expect a lot from these valuable volunteers, we continue to work with our Regional Managers and Territory Managers regarding Chapters experiencing problems with their respective Lodge to ensure harmony and the success of both units. Let's give a round of applause to our 43 dedicated volunteers!

Since I joined the staff at Moose International twenty-five years ago, and for as long as anyone can remember, the Women of the Moose have sponsored an event for our Senior Class as well as our three outstanding scholars in the freshman, sophomore and junior class. This year, we visited Medieval Times in Schaumburg, IL and enjoyed a fun night of medieval spirit. Our knight won the tournament! Here's a look at the fun we had that night...*(SENIOR ACTIVITY NIGHT VIDEO)*

May 1, 2023, we began the Chapter year with 350,182 members. We processed a total of 8,160 new and re-enroll applications for membership which is an increase over last year of 944 applications. As of April 30, 2024, membership totaled 351,283 for an increase of 1,101! Great job! Give yourselves a big hand!

That said however, I'm not sure we will be as fortunate at the end of 2025. Since our unification, many women have chosen only to pay their Lodge dues and have begun dropping from the Chapter rolls. Others simply don't

understand the new structure and haven't renewed their Lodge dues. These women became members because someone cared enough to ask them. Some of these members had been members for many years yet they let their dues lapse for whatever reason. Were they mistreated, do they not understand our unification or did the Chapter not meet their needs or expectations? Many have no idea what their dues even do to help others in need. \$10 of every \$15 dues renewal directly financially supports operations at Mooseheart and Moosehaven. Even if the member is not actively participating by attending Chapter meetings or functions, her dues are vital to the continued security of our Twin Cities.

The staff at Women of the Moose Headquarters and the Grand Council have been aware this would potentially happen. We have made a unified decision to waive the requirement to increase membership by 1 for the 2024-2025 Chapter year only. *(pause for applause)*

While the requirement will be waived for the Chapter to earn the Award of Achievement, individual members still need to meet the sponsor requirements to earn a higher degree.

I do see a bright future ahead and am very thankful for everyone's efforts to maintain their membership goals but it looks like we've got work to do!

This year, we decided we weren't going to spend 4 months grading the Award of Achievement and Golden Gavel so we set specific deadlines for forms and appeals. I am proud to announce that 458 Chapters, as you saw them scroll before the start of this meeting, earned the Award of Achievement for the 2023-2024 Chapter year. Let's give them a big hand for their success.

Additionally, the Grand Council approved a proposal to add the Pledge to Childhood back into the Chapter Meeting agenda. While it is currently recited at our Higher Degree meetings, reminding our members of our traditions and purpose is valuable to educating new members and re-energizing current members.

So, are you ready for the top 10 states with a gain in membership? For the first time since I can remember, there were actually 15 Associations with a gain in Chapter membership.

In 10th Place - with +22 Georgia

In 9th place – with +24 Oregon

In 8th Place – with +25 Oklahoma – Southern Kansas

In 7th Place – with +37 New Jersey

In 6th Place – Montana with +39

In 5th place – with +42 Massachusetts

In 4th place – with +51 the Dakotas

In 3rd place –North Carolina +52.

In 2nd place with +139 – Arizona-New Mexico

And with +182, moving them from last place in the past to first place, California-Nevada!

All we have to do is plan a wide range of activities and invite people to become part of something good, then make good on that promise.

We must rebuild our Chapters, make them stronger and educate our members about what it is we do as a fraternity. We must sponsor members who believe in our cause and believe our mission is to ensure the future of Mooseheart and Moosehaven and those dependent on us for their very existence but we won't be able to keep them if we don't treat them with some kindness.

Our Orientation program is so very vital to the success of every Chapter and our fraternity. We aren't just a local bar – we are still the largest women's fraternal organization in the world. Why not tell people about it? Why not share our passion to help others? And while we are helping others, we **can** have fun!

As a reminder of all the good works our Chapters and members provide to our residents and our communities, please enjoy this video. *KEYNOTE VIDEO*

Whenever you remember the good old days, realize we can be that way again. All you have to do is plan accordingly and treat others as you would like to be treated. Aren't you proud a place called Mooseheart was there to give our children solace when their life was upside down? Aren't you proud you volunteered to donate a little time to an event to help make their life easier?

And let's not forget our Moosehaven seniors who live worry free because of each and every one of you.

As you leave this meeting this morning you will receive one of my favorite things – packing cubes to make it easier to organize belongings during your Moose travels. Or maybe squeeze in an added purchase from Catalog Sales.

Thank you for another year of success! Thank you for your sympathy, your thoughts and your prayers during the recent loss of my amazing husband Floyd. I appreciate all the cards and social media messages and have an amazing support system in my sisterhood of the Women of the Moose. Let's focus on the positive and please, if you didn't get anything else from this meeting, remember to be kind to one another.