

Ad Astra per Aspera.

Many of you know that my family has hosted a passel of foreign exchange students over the years. It's a family tradition at this point—my dad (in the sixties) and I (in the nineties) both spent time as foreign exchange students. The second exchange student we ever hosted, sweet Martina from Italy, laughed about our state motto, because, apparently, the 1861 Kansas legislature was pretty bad at Latin grammar. It *should* read “Per Aspera ad Astra”.

When Nanci Rosensteel, our International Representative to Kansas State Chapter Convention in 2023, recited our state motto in her remarks, I giggled about it myself and caught a few sideways glances from my sisters on the board, but not because of Latin grammar. Nanci had no idea that it was a foreshadowing of this speech. And I'll tell you a secret—I've been thinking about our state's motto and this speech since before I was even appointed to this board.

To The Stars Through Difficulty.

From a historical perspective, we know what the “difficulty” is in our state motto. The Kansas Historical Society website states “the motto refers to the difficulties Kansas went through (Bleeding Kansas) to become one of the stars on the U.S. flag...The stars in our motto are not the stars in the sky.”

And here today, in 2024, we've seen some of our own difficulty. A pandemic none of us will ever forget, though we'd like to. A greater feeling of political, social, and economic divide than most of us have experienced in our lifetimes. And beyond that, we all have our own individual and family difficulties because we're human and that's part of life.

I'd like to think our goal is to make the most of it and carry on. It's certainly mine. That's how we go “to the stars” in our personal lives. We strive to do good, be kind, and stay in the moment. We try to make life better and more meaningful for our children, and launch them into the world as good, independent humans with a lifetime of experiences in front of them. We reach for our own success personally and professionally and try to help pull others up when we can.

I firmly believe that there is essential good in people. I've seen it over and over again in the last 44 years. And it's all around us today, in this room. It's the reason our Sisterhood still exists after 155 years—we are “women helping women reach for the stars”. We aren't helping those women for our benefit. We're helping them for THEIRS.

P.E.O.s aren't going toward the stars in the sky. Those stars are our aspirations. We aspire to build and share a bond of sisterhood with all P.E.O.s. We aspire to help remove barriers so that any and every woman who wants to advance her education has that opportunity. We aspire to do good in our communities. We aspire to help women move forward in their lives. We aspire to continue our own learning. It's not always easy. But it's worth it. Our goal is to go

To the Stars Through P.E.O.

And that's my theme for this year. To The Stars Through P.E.O. How will we do that? We will: Sponsor Project Applicants; Try Something New; Activate Inactives; Reinvest in our Chapters; and Seek New Sisters.

Sponsor Project Applicants. This goal is simple enough. We know what that means. Specifically, I want us, as a state, to sponsor two percent more candidates for International and State projects than we did last year. If your chapter did not help someone apply for a project last year, there's no time like the present. If your chapter did sponsor one or more applicants, try for one more this year. Two percent is very attainable, and imminently beatable. I think we can do it.

Try Something New. I want local chapters to stretch their boundaries. Try a new social activity. Think of a new way to raise funds. Find a new way to be visible or volunteer within your community as a chapter. Change up something about your chapter. There are parts of P.E.O. that are determined for us, but every chapter has its own personality and flare. I want you to take that and RUN with it. Spice it up! Kick up your heels! Give it a whirl! What's the worst that can happen? If your "something new" falls flat, learn from it and move on! Don't get stuck. There's a Part 2, though. I want you to BRAG when you try something new. Post on our Kansas Facebook page. Send an email to your board buddy. I'd love to have a whole list of "try something new" activities to celebrate at convention next year.

Activate Inactives. Technically, the correct term is "reinstate". But I had already used the R in the word STARS. Besides, ACTIVATE is more powerful word. Reach out to your inactive sisters. Invite them to a social event. Contact them to return their emblem, if your president has it. Find a way to reconnect to them and help them come back to P.E.O. Our human need for connection is innate. P.E.O. is so much more than scholarships and loans. It's a sisterhood. A relationship. An automatic group of friends there to celebrate your wins and support you through your losses. My life is better because of my P.E.O. sisters.

Reinvest In Your Chapter. Put more of yourself into your chapter. That doesn't just mean money. It means time and energy, too. Dedicate yourself to improving your meeting attendance—this goal applies to me, too. When a sister suggests a spur-of-the-moment get-together, rethink choosing to stay home if you're available to participate. Offer to help an officer with a big task or chair a committee. Suggest and then LEAD a chapter activity, fundraiser, or program. Help your chapter increase its internal and external fundraising success. I would love to see our state giving increase by five percent by next year. And as I've said before—BRAG about the great things your chapter is accomplishing.

Seek New Sisters. The final piece is spreading the message of P.E.O. by initiating new sisters. If you have a great project applicant who isn't a P.E.O., invite her to membership! You already know she's amazing because you're helping her advance her education. Give her the opportunity to pay it forward through membership. If you talk about P.E.O. in your life, you're bound to have someone say "I want to know more about that"—so talk about it! Look for potential sisters in different areas of your life. I invited my chapter sister Sarah after I saw her wearing a Cottey College t-shirt—I barely knew her at the time. She's an alumna and had never been given the opportunity to join.

Everyone's Different, Everyone Belongs.

Finally, let's talk about my logo. Aside from feeling a deep connection to our state motto as a 5th generation Kansan, I knew all along that my theme would be about stars. I have loved stars since long before I ever became a P.E.O., where we have star imagery embedded into so much of our sisterhood. I signed up for my first email account when I was a senior in high school and still use it—aidanstar. I collected star trinkets and baby items to decorate the nursery when I had each of my girls. My mom even found a crib with stars etched into the wood. Somewhere in the dark recesses of my childhood

bedroom is a certificate identifying my star in the International Star Registry. So, there were always going to be stars.

Naturally, there are seven of them, representing our seven founders. Those incredible girls, around the same age as my older daughter, who created our sisterhood 155 years ago. Seven stars also gets us all seven colors of the rainbow, Roy G. Biv, for those of you who know that mnemonic. And all of it is connected in a sweeping colorful circle. None of this is an accident.

We are those seven young women, here today with a sisterhood of our own.

We are all of those colors of the rainbow—with our individual lives, beliefs, talents, hopes, dreams, and aspirations.

We are a circle of women helping women reach for the stars.

This year, as a state chapter, I want us to celebrate the ways we are different but focus on the things that bring us together. We are all individuals, beautiful and worthy exactly as we are, but the things that make us different from each other are not the only things that matter.

We are all different. And we all belong.

I love you all and I'm so excited for this year. To the Stars Through P.E.O.