

Incoming Speech by 2025-2026 KSC President Jan Guevel

Thank you for this tremendous privilege of serving you as your Kansas State Chapter President for the coming year. I look forward to working with you to make our P.E.O. connections as strong as they can be.

A few weeks ago, I thought, how do I even begin to tell my sisters all I want to say in a meaningful way?

And then I said, Jan, relax, you are 'Anchored With P.E.O.'

This is our theme for the coming year. You see, growing up, I was a Navy brat. I moved 18 times in 18 years. My dad was the commander of a nuclear submarine. He was one of the original Hunt for Red October guys. While growing up, I remember being surrounded by anchors all the time, even down to the brass buttons on my father's uniform. This symbol became a common icon in my life.

Now, most of you know some anchor basics. For a ship, an anchor is a device attached by a chain and cast overboard to hold it in a particular place.

For our coming year, I consider an anchor to be a reliable or principal support. This is the way I envision P.E.O.

I became a P.E.O. over 30 years ago. I was a young anxious woman new to a small town with one small little girl and one on the way when Chapter CO, Burlington, Kansas, gave me the gift of membership. Back in those days, many of the chapter members still wore hats and gloves, and it was a little intimidating, to say the least. Of course, what was one of the very first things they asked me to do? Anyone? Yes, they asked me to become an officer in the chapter. My first thought was, "Really? No, not me. I couldn't do that." But then I thought if these women who were more experienced than I in P.E.O. and life had the confidence in me to nominate me for an office, why shouldn't I try it? Yes, along the way, I got a little help now and then from some of my sisters, in the most loving way possible. But this gave me the confidence to grow as a young woman in a leadership role in a safe environment. My P.E.O. sisters, including some very loving past state presidents, Sophia Zetmeir, Betty Cleland, and Charlotte Summers, continued to urge me to expand my leadership roles with our sisterhood, and I continued to grow in a safe space.

P.E.O. became my anchor.

When I was new to town, P.E.O. offered me instant friendships in Burlington, Alabama, Tennessee, and now in Kansas City. When my daughter was born, P.E.O. celebrated with me through meals, cards, and flowers. When I took a new office in the chapter, my sisters were there to support me with encouragement. When I had surgery again, my sisters were with me. When I was elected to the Kansas State Chapter Executive Board, boy, they were there and excited for me, and when my dad passed away, they were there to mourn with me.

Now, many of you are quite familiar with an anchor, what it does, and what it looks like, but did you also know that it is the weight and length of the chain that helps hold the boat in place?

I like to think of P.E.O. as a great big ship; the anchor is my P.E.O. chapter, and the links in the chain are my P.E.O. sisters. Each of my sisters is a very important link in the chain. It is how we are connected with each other.

It is the connections we have with each other that make us strong. You have heard we are only as strong as our weakest link, but I think P.E.O. sisters who are strong secure themselves to that sister who may be going through a rough time. They hang on to her, help build her back up and support her when the seas are too tall to manage alone.

Why P.E.O.? And why now? In 2021, research commissioned by Cigna Healthcare Corporation found that 59 percent of women reported feelings of loneliness. This makes a strong case for why P.E.O., why now, and how our sisterhood can make a difference in the lives of other women. But, for it to work, the connections that we have now in our sisterhood have to be meaningful and compelling.

We have to talk the P.E.O. talk, walk the walk, and play up our connections with each other in P.E.O. These connections matter and can make a difference in the life of a woman. Yes, P.E.O.'s mission is about educating women, and that is how we make a difference, but the cornerstone of our sisterhood is friendship.

This past winter, I was at a Christmas party for my husband's company, and to his credit, he makes sure everyone knows what I have been so busy with these past few years. He is a cheerleader for our sisterhood. Anyway, one young woman tracked me down after the event. She asked me to meet her for coffee because she was genuinely interested in hearing more about P.E.O. I met with her and in the course of our conversation, I learned she was a young mom working from home. She said that with her young son and working from home, she just didn't get out and was missing camaraderie and a group she could belong to and help make a difference with. Wow! This is precisely what I am talking about.

How are the connections between you, your P.E.O. chapter, and your sisters? What do you do to make sure the connections are strong in your chapter? Do you notice the sister who may be sitting alone in a meeting, and go over and visit with her? Do you drop a note or email to someone you noticed who has been missing from your meetings? Do you contact a sister who you think might be going through a rough time? Do you offer congratulations to that sister who just conquered a hurdle in her life? It is not just up to your care and concern committee to make these things happen. It is up to each one of us to anchor those connections. All women in our chapters need to feel connected. They need to feel seen. Our sisterhood is much more than belonging to something; it's about doing something together that makes belonging matter.

Has P.E.O. become a permanent and vital part of your life? Life is so much better when we are connected. Are you anchored with P.E.O.?

This year, the goals of Kansas State Chapter are:

- 1) Chapters will increase their membership this year by at least one new member through initiation or reinstatement by building connections and increasing chapter vitality.
- 2) Chapters will promote our International Projects, Cottey College, Kansas Cottey College Scholarship, and Kansas Sunflower Grants this year to increase the number of project applicants, recipients, and overall general awareness.
- 3) Sisters will celebrate P.E.O. in their chapters this year as they encourage each woman to consider her connections to others in the chapter and to the chapter as a whole.

To help us achieve our goals this year, you will be given a type of bingo card as you leave. It looks like what is on the screen now. This will be available on the P.E.O. Kansas website after convention as well. The activities on the card are aimed not only to help us achieve our goals, but to increase the length and strength of our P.E.O. connections, our chain to our anchor. As you mark off a square, achieve an entire "bingo," or maybe even a "blackout card," let us know. Shout it from the rooftop, post pictures on our P.E.O. Kansas Facebook page, tell us about it in your President's letters, or drop your board buddy an email with your activities. We want to celebrate those connecting activities with you. We will recognize these accomplishments next year at convention.

To close, I would like to read you a poem entitled:

"You Are My Anchor"

Sometimes in life, you meet someone who makes your world better simply by being a part of it.

And while others drift in and out when the waters get rough, they remain steadily by your side.

Even as the tides rise and fall, there is no force strong enough to divide you.

Thank you for being my someone.

The calm through the storm.

The safety I rely on, my unwavering friend. My anchor.

We can all be "Anchored With P.E.O."

Thank you.