



# The Tennessee Optimist



*Acceptance speech of Bob Underwood, then Governor-Elect Tennessee District Convention Saturday 22 August 2009*

## SOAR ON EAGLES WINGS

"I was thrilled when I saw President-Elect Mark Shriver's logo for our coming year: an eagle, flying, with the words "Promise Yourself for the Kids." Our kids are worth whatever we can promise them. And in promising them--we must keep our promises!

With that said, let me focus for the next few moments on the eagle, and the Tennessee District's overarching theme and motto, which will help us in our efforts to "Promise Yourself for the Kids."

I usually am a very excited possessor of season tickets to Dollywood. I love to go to Dollywood. I love the food. I love the rides. I love the food. I love the exhibits. I love the food. I love the shows. And did I mention I love the food?

But there is also something else at Dollywood that I love--and that is the Eagle Mountain Sanctuary. This is a 30,000 square foot aviary for damaged eagles. Here the eagles can stay and hopefully be recuperated and released back into the wild. But it is also a place where those eagles that could not survive in the wild can stay and be protected. I love to go and watch these majestic birds; the symbol of our country's freedom. They are so

beautiful and I am glad that they are protected and that I can see them. On the other hand, I hate to see them there. They are confined. These eagles were meant to be free. They were meant to soar far above us. They were created by our God for a number of purposes and one of those is for our inspiration.

Let me quote Isaiah chapter 40 verse 31: "...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Let's be honest. That is part of our problem. Most of us have been in Optimism for a number of years. We have grown weary. We have come to the point of being faint. In fact, there are a number of us who have just stopped--stopped going, stopped growing and stopped serving. Let us look to our eagle and soar. For as the eagle is meant to soar--so is an Optimist! And don't forget, we are going to soar for our kids. Promise Yourself for the Kids. There is a lot that we need to do for them. There are a lot of ways that we can help them to grow and mature. We can help them to face their coming adulthood with the help to not only survive but to conquer; to soar on eagle's wings: "to run and not grow weary, to walk and not be faint."

Our eagle is going to be our inspiration and our theme is to soar this coming year. Now let's look at our motto: Lead Our Youth. We are not going to be able to soar if we

don't lead. If we don't lead we will be just like the eagles in the Eagle Mountain Sanctuary at Dollywood. We will be where we were not intended to be. And we won't be able to accomplish what we were intended to accomplish. All of us ... All of us need to soar. All of us .... All of us need to lead.

We learn from Optimist International that we are declining. Our numbers just aren't what they once were. And the bottom line of what that means is that we are not helping as many kids. Kids are being left out. They are being ignored. They are hurting and worrying because we are not there to give them what they need. Optimism is important because our kids are important.

In closing, let me just mention another important symbol of our country and that is our men and women of the armed services. One of the many sayings that they are famous for is "none left behind," meaning that they are going to do the best that they can to leave no soldier behind enemy lines. As many as came on the mission will return from the mission. None left behind. May we leave none of our kids behind because we grew weary and faint. No! Let us instead "Lead our Youth" and "Soar on Eagles Wings" this coming Optimist year!"

**Gov. Bob Underwood**