



February is Sertoma's National Heritage

Sertoma's National Heritage Program (a.k.a.; Freedom and Democracy) began in 1951. It was started with the acceptance of a challenge issued by noted columnist Drew Pearson to see to it that every child and home receive a copy of the Declaration of Independence. It was one of the first national activities of the Sertoma organization. This information comes from our history and though we have not found any of the original materials in our archives, we have photos and the presentation that was prepared for the clubs.

The first program came out as a flannel board presentation on being aware of the evils of communism. Many of you may remember "flannel boards" from school or church – for the younger ones think of it as sort of a power point without a projector or computer.

This program provided Sertoma and its members a means to demonstrate both loyalty and pride in America -- at a time when many were being questioned about their loyalties to America as we entered the era of the "cold war."

In looking at some of photos and write ups, it provides an interesting perspective on a moment in time for our organization and our society.

But, from that first program on the concern for communism, our members have found new and inventive ways to address the values and history of our nation. Some of those efforts have faded away with time, and others remain part of our culture. With our nation at war for several years, we have seen a resurgence of some activities and the creation of new activities. And much like the activities of the early 1950's they now reflect the concerns and issues of our society in 2011.

One of the activities still supported by many Sertoma clubs is to provide copies of our Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights to students and at nationalization ceremonies. In past years, I know of at least one club that had developed a program with them in full 1776 costumes portraying some of the Founding Fathers.

And, if you have not had the privilege to be present at a naturalization ceremony – then you have missed a real opportunity to sense and understand the value of our National Heritage. I am not sure who gets the real gift when you have the privilege to be one of the first to welcome a new citizen into our society.

Of course in Sertoma, National Heritage is almost synonymous with essay

contests. From kindergarten to high school students, for over 50 years, drawings and essays have been created to express "What Freedom Means to Me" and "What I Love About America."

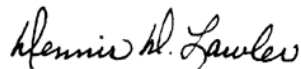
These efforts provide an opportunity to reflect on the privilege we have to be American citizens, not only to the students, but the teachers, families and even the Sertoma members. And regardless of your politics or the issues we may face as a nation today – America is the most successful democratic and free society in history.

And today, even as we face challenges and divisions within our society, we see both in Sertoma and around us, a basis for our shared heritage. This is reflected in the efforts to support and honor the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. Some clubs work to ship packages to our troops. I know individual members who contribute to similar efforts through other organizations, while others work to provide support for families with parents overseas, and to welcome the heroes home.

As our Clubs' celebrate Freedom Week, February 2011, we continue to honor a heritage that stretches back more than 200 years. This week may no longer represent the focus it had in the past for our organization or in our society. Driven by an overwhelming amount of communication and information, we face more diverse and numerous challenges. But that should not diminish the value of our efforts. Each time we see individuals remain seated on a plane to allow the service men and women get off first to see family, or feel the chill as we share in our National Anthem, we know the result of our efforts ensure we have not, and will not take our great heritage for granted.

National Heritage is not the only cause of Sertomans, it may not be the most utilized program, but that does not diminish the impact of the value and benefit of efforts such as we celebrate this week. On behalf of the Sertoma family and our nation, thank you for making National Heritage and Freedom Week a priority in your community.

Yours in Service to Mankind,



Dennis Lawler

