



Third District Today

Newsletter

Special Late - Summer Fall 2026 Edition



The mission of Sons of Norway is to promote and to preserve the heritage and culture of Norway, to celebrate our relationship with other Nordic countries, and to provide quality insurance and financial products to our members.

President Helmold's Fall 2026 Message



Hi All,

I hope that everyone has had a safe and enjoyable summer. I also hope that everyone is aware that Sons of Norway is entering into a partnership with BetterLife.

The International Board held an all-member meeting via zoom to announce the new partnership. They have put some information on their website. After attending the all-member meeting, the members of the Third District Board sent a list of questions to the International Board of Directors in May. We

recently received answers to some of our questions. The questions and answers are posted on the Third District website..

I am very excited about the new partnership. As it was explained at our convention, Sons of Norway was in financial trouble, and this partnership will allow us to continue as Sons of Norway lodges.

We don't have all the details yet, but we do know that the Sons of Norway Bylaws will no longer be what guides us. We will be governed by the BetterLife Bylaws and the Sons of Norway policies and procedures which are in the process of being rewritten.

I have appointed a committee to review the Third District Bylaws and the Third District Policies and Procedures and to recommend any changes needed to be in line with BetterLife's Bylaws and the new Sons of Norway policies and procedures. Changes to the Bylaws will then go to the delegates of the 2026 convention for approval. Changes to the policies and procedures will go to the Third District Board for approval. I will share any new information in my future President's Messages.

(continued on next page)

Third District Today Special Late - Summer Fall 2026 Edition

Many good and interesting things took place at our 2026 Third District Convention. I would like to highlight a few that will most affect the local lodges.

First, my congratulations to the new Third District Board:

President Stephen - Helmold from Norden Lodge.

Vice-President - Katie Brink from Hampton Roads Lodge.

Secretary - Karen Olsen-Helmold from Norden Lodge.

Assistant Secretary - Karen Lima from Troll Lodge.

Treasurer - Diana Syvertsen from Noreg Lodge.

Charitable Trust Director - Peter Hanson from Norumbega Lodge.

Cultural Director - Cherri Johnson from Bla Fjell Lodge.

Publicity Director - William (Bill) Browning from Norskevenner Lodge.

Zone 1 Director - Leif Easterson from Loyal Lodge

Assistant Zone 1 Directors - Elaine Breiland from Lodge Brooklyn and Susan Olson from Loyal Lodge.

Zone 3 Director - Paul Kornbrekke from Nansen Lodge

Assistant Zone 3 Director - Barbara Bensen from Noreg Lodge.

Zone 4 Director - Kaare Hansen from Norrona Lodge.

Assistant Zone 4 Director - Gregory Lima from Troll Lodge.

Zone 5 Director - Christine Taylor from Tampa Bay Lodge.

Zone 6 Director - Linda Hestvik from Washington Lodge.

Assistant Zone 6 Director - Marie Hansen from Washington Lodge.

Zone 7 Director - Dirk Hanson, from Southern Star Lodge.

Assistant Zone 7 Directors - Don Watrud from Norge Norsemen/Hampton Roads Lodges and Robert Longworth from Hampton Roads Lodge.

The delegates passed the merger of Zone 2 into Zone 4. This was necessary because a number of Zone 2 lodges have disbanded or merged into other lodges leaving only two lodges remaining in Zone 2.

Also passed was the ability of the District Lodge to suspend term limits for the Third District Offices.

We passed a resolution to request that the International Lodge be re-constituted and there be an International Lodge meeting.

The delegates also passed a resolution to investigate other Scandinavian organizations and the possibility of forming our own fraternal organization just in case the partnership with BetterLife
(continued on the next page)

Third District Today Special Late - Summer Fall 2026 Edition

does not work out. This is only an investigation, and nothing will be done without a vote of the District Lodge (the delegates) at a future date. In my four years as president, as I visited lodges or held programs on zoom with members from lodges throughout the district, this idea was raised many times. If anyone in your lodge is interested in serving on the committee, please have them contact me.

The Third District Board and its committees announced a few programs in which I hope that of our lodges will participate.

Recruitment and Retention Contest - To entice lodges to recruit new members and offer programs that will help to retain members, the Third District is holding a recruitment and retention contest. The contest will run from June 2026 through May 2027. There will be 3 categories for which prizes will be awarded. Details are available on the Third District Website.

Newsletter Contest – We are bringing back the Third District Newsletter contest. Information along with a sample scoring sheet had been sent to all lodge editors from District Secretary Karen Olsen-Helmold. Information about the contest and a sample scoring sheet are also available on the Third District website.

The **Toolbox** is available on the Third District website. Revitalization Committee Chairperson, Christine Taylor, has been hard at work to get lots of ideas to help make your meetings fun and interesting. She has gathered (and continues to gather) programs, skits and events that were successfully done at local lodges and put them in our toolbox for all to share.

The Third District also announced the **Lodge Assistance Program**. Since we no longer get Fraternal Funds from the home office, the Board wanted to do something to help those lodges with limited funds. Lodge presidents and secretaries have gotten information from District Secretary, Karen Olsen-Helmold. The request form is available on the Third District Website. This is only a small part of what took place during the convention.

The next convention will be June 4 to 7, 2028 in Riverhead, Long Island, NY. I hope every lodge will be represented.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me either by phone or email.

Fraternally,

Stephen Helmold

District 3 President

(continued on the next page)

Third District Today Special Late - Summer Fall 2026 Edition

Summer 2026 Third District Presidents Message

As I write this message Karen and I are preparing to go to the district convention. We have been working with the convention committee over the many months to make sure everything comes off without a problem. We are excited to welcome all the convention delegates and very excited to welcome the representatives from BetterLife. I am sure that there will be a lot of questions for them as Sons of Norway is partnering with BetterLife making this a new direction for Sons of Norway. Many members have already overwhelmed me with questions about the partnership, so I created a committee to compile all the questions which they did in record time. The list of questions has been forwarded to the International Board, and we are hoping for answers before the start of our convention. If not, we know they will be asked again during our Third District Lodge meeting. It is my sincere hope that this partnership will be a successful endeavor for Sons of Norway going into the future.

During the Third District Lodge meeting, committees will be announcing new and revised initiatives that will take place in the next two years to help strengthen our lodges, one of which is the Third District Newsletter contest. I will share all the details of our great plans in my next president's message.

The district board is working hard to recruit new members and to that end will be setting up a booth again at Scanfest to do just that. We hope to sign up many more new members that day as we did last year.

Youth Camp was held this July from Sunday the 26th to Saturday the 1st of August at Camp Koinonia in upstate New York Also, Cultural Camp will be this year from Wednesday, September 16th to Sunday September 20th at Isle of the Palms, South Carolina. The first one last year was such a success that we anticipate being sold out soon. There is a lot more information about our cultural camp on the Third District Website.

That is all for now. Till my next president's message in the fall, Karen and I and the whole Third District Board would like to wish you all a very happy summer.

Fraternally,
Stephen Helmold

(continued on the next page)

Richard Lee Tonnesen

November 15, 1939 – June 2, 2026

Richard Lee Tonnesen, 86, passed away peacefully on June 2, 2026. A devoted husband, loving father, proud grandfather, master craftsman, and extraordinary community leader, Richard lived a life defined by hard work, faith, family, and a lifelong commitment to his heritage.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 15, 1939, to Oscar and Evelyn Tonnesen, Richard moved to New Jersey in 1953. A second-generation Norwegian-American whose father emigrated from Farsund, Norway, Richard carried immense pride in his roots throughout his life. He attended Passaic County Vocational and Technical School before studying engineering and drafting at Hillyer College.

A master craftsman, Richard was a proud member of the Carpenters Union for over 40 years, serving in key supervisory roles. He also proudly served his country for seven years in the United States Army and Army Reserve and served his faith community as a past council member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church.

Richard and his beloved wife of 65 years, Ellen, raised their four sons in Lake Telemark in Rockaway, New Jersey, before retiring to Punta Gorda, Florida. Norwegian culture was a central pillar of the Tonnesen household; Richard, Ellen, and their four sons were all active members of the Nor-Bu Folk Dancers, celebrating their heritage together as a family. In 1981, the family was honored with the New Jersey Fraternal Congress "Family of the Year" award.

For decades, Richard devoted his time, wisdom, and leadership to the Sons of Norway, working tirelessly to build and promote it into the best fraternal benefit society in the world. An active member of Nor-Bu Lodge No. 3-427, he served as President for four years, Vice President for two years, Secretary for three years, Treasurer for two years, and Auditor for many years. His local impact led to extensive leadership at the district and international levels:

District Leadership: Served as President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Director for the Third District Sons of Norway, as well as Co-Chairman of the 1974 District Convention and Chairman of the Sports Committee for the 1978 District Convention.

International Leadership: Served as an International Director for four years—including two years as the fifth member of the International Executive Committee—and served on the Investment & Finance Committee (1986), Fraternal Committee (1988), and Law Committee (1990) for International Conventions.

Service & Legacy: Co-founded the Nor-Bu Junior Lodge in 1973, served four years as Building and Grounds Chairman for Land of the Vikings, represented his lodge at 13 district conventions and eight international conventions, served as a part-time insurance representative, and was twice named Lodge President of the Year (1977 and 1978).

After retiring to Florida, Richard traded the gavel and tool belt for the golf course. He became an avid golfer, even earning a plaque to celebrate a coveted hole-in-one.

(continued on the next page)

Richard Lee Tonnesen Obituary (continued)

Richard's family is immensely proud of the endless time and passion he dedicated to his heritage and community. Above all, he was a great man whose presence, wisdom, love and warmth will be deeply missed by his family and many friends.



Richard is survived by his beloved wife, Ellen Tonnesen; his four sons, Richard, Scott, Edward, and Sean Tonnesen, and his 11 Grandchildren and 2 Great Grandchildren; and his brother, Robert Tonnesen. He was preceded in death by his parents, Oscar and Evelyn Tonnesen.

In accordance with Richard's wishes, a private memorial service will be held for the immediate family. A full celebration of life honoring both Richard and his beloved wife, Ellen, will take place together in the future to commemorate their extraordinary 65-year marriage and shared journey together.

Third District Recruitment and Retention Contest

Our recruitment and retention contest is just getting started. After 2 months, June and July, the leaders in each category are:

1. Actual New Members:

- 1st – Washington Lodge 8 new members
- 2nd – Nansen Lodge 3 new members
- 3rd – Gateway to Florida Lodge 3 new members

2. The greatest percent increase:

- 1st – Lauderdale 4.08%
- 2nd – North Carolina Viking 3.57%
- 3rd – Gateway to Florida 3.26%

3. The greatest increase in overall membership;

- 1st – Gateway to Florida +3 members
- 2nd – Lauderdale +2 members
- 3rd – North Caroling Vikings +2 members

A lodge can only win once. The contest ends on May 31, 2027. So, there is still plenty of time to win. There is more information about the contest on the Third District Website! Each quarter, Karen Olsen-Helmold the Third District Secretary, will post the standings in the TDT.

