

# FRIENDS of NRA

– LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #137 –



*The original Friends of NRA logo.*

At the 1992 NRA Annual Meetings in Salt Lake City, Wayne Sheets (NRA Director of Planning and Development) and I were discussing the success of the new NRA Round-Up program that Midway had started in January. I offered that we could do more and that when Brenda and I returned home we were going to throw a fundraising party for the NRA.

The following week, we were on the phone to a few of our friends – Jim Joy, Don Martin, Bob Heidenreich, Dick Thomas, Tom Mendenhall, Don Rose, John McGee, Bill Pape and several others. They all thought it was a grand

idea, so we began to have regular meetings. First, we needed a name, a date and a location. Jim Joy came up with the name Friends of NRA, and the Committee chose October 10th, 1992 for a date and the Hearnes Multi-Purpose Building on the University of Missouri campus as the location.

Now the hard work

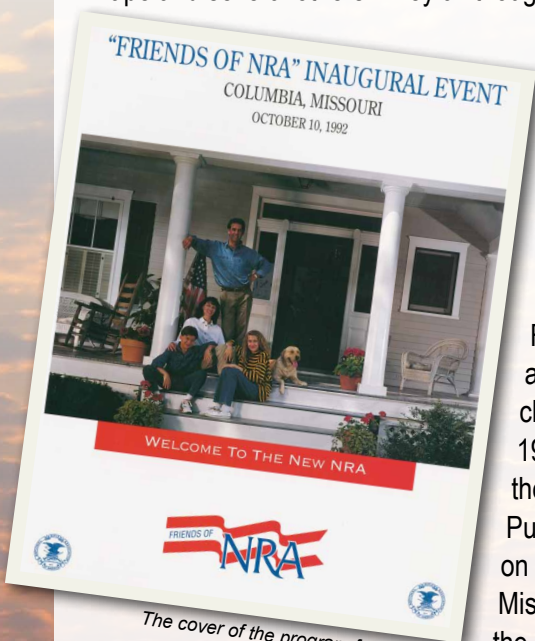
began – planning and organizing, selling tickets and soliciting fundraising items. I kept up with Wayne Sheets all summer; during one of our phone calls he said that there was a lot of talk about the event at NRA Headquarters – but they wanted to postpone it until spring, so they could provide more support. My response was **no**, our Committee had invested a lot and we were going forward.

The NRA gave us their full support! John Smithbaker, Dennis Eggers and Mike Benecke were hugely instrumental in making the event a success. Bob Corbin, NRA President, was our keynote speaker; several other key NRA staffers also attended. In total, over 1,000 Friends of the NRA gathered at that first event. It was truly a game changer for the NRA and, I believe, for America!

Behind the scenes, Wayne Sheets and I agreed that half of the money raised, by each committee, would

stay in their state and be awarded as grants to organizations supporting NRA's missions. This was a critical decision, as it helps volunteers stay engaged, as they see the money from their efforts put to use in their local communities. One thing we didn't envision was the value of mobilizing NRA volunteers in over 1,000 communities, and getting NRA members together at their annual events. Today, by any standard, Friends of NRA is one of the most successful programs in the history of the NRA – and it keeps getting better.

**"Now the hard work began..."**



*The cover of the program from the first Friends of NRA event.*



Larry Potterfield  
Founder and CEO  
MidwayUSA,  
Columbia, Missouri  
12 January 2016



*A few of the original FNRA Committee members at the 20th anniversary reception the night before the 20th event. L-R Jim Joy, Dick Thomas, Larry Potterfield, John McGee, Tom Mendenhall and Bob Heidenreich.*