

NARSOL's directors elect new chair

written by Sandy | November 10, 2021



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Paul Shannon. In some circles that name is as familiar as is one's own.

I will never forget the first time I met Paul. It was in 2012 at NARSOL's Albuquerque conference, the first conference I attended. I was still fairly new to NARSOL and was meeting everybody in person for the first time. It was shortly before the opening ceremony, and I was close to the front on the side with a few other board members. Even in the conversational noise of the large group, I heard a collective sound of excitement, and the voices sort of coalesced into, "It's Paul Shannon!" A small group had just entered and were standing in the aisle right beside me. One of them was a man with his hair pulled back into a ponytail and a blue bandana around his head. Everyone around him was turned toward him. Nodding toward me, someone said to him, "And this is Sandy." He turned

toward me, said my name, and smiled, and I was struck by his eyes. They were some of the kindest I had ever seen and as warm as the huge bear hug he enveloped me in.

As long as I have been on NARSOL's Board of Directors, Paul has been its presiding officer. He has helped steer us through rough waters and smooth to where we are today. He has presided over our meetings with deliberation and calm. He has listened to conflicts, proposed solutions, reconciled differences. If he had a firmly held belief or opinion on a topic, he stood by it even though he knew it would not prevail in the final vote, and I have never seen a hint of resentment or bitterness from him. Any anger he has ever displayed has been at the injustices heaped upon those on the registry.

He has been a constant, and everything he has ever said or done in regard to NARSOL has been totally, **totally**, with the good of the organization and the people we serve foremost in his mind.

This year Paul stepped down as the board chair, electing not to run for office for the upcoming term. Paul is not a large man, but he leaves some very big shoes to fill.

When asked for his thoughts on this occasion, Paul said:

I'm happy to announce that Robin Vanderwall will be the new chair of NARSOL's board of Directors. I stepped down as chair at NARSOL's November board meeting. Because I was a founder of NARSOL (then called RSOL – remember?) I have served as chair since we transitioned from an administration team to a board of directors. My goal was to provide continuity from NARSOL's earliest days in 2007, to help keep us on track, and to stay out of the way of the many wonderful efforts that other board members and all our great volunteers have been undertaking. But now it's time to make a transition for the good of the organization. Most of you know Robin and the many talents he brings to NARSOL.

This past month the board elected him to the position of chair. I hope you will all welcome Robin to this new position and support him in carrying out his duties. NARSOL also welcomes Michael Shimkin as the new vice-chair of the organization, and we are very lucky that Brenda will continue as executive director, Larry as treasurer, and Sandy as secretary. I will remain a member of the board and look forward to working with our new and our continuing officers on the important work that lies ahead of us. My best – and a special upcoming holiday season – to you all.

His successor could not have been better chosen. Having served for some years as NARSOL's vice-chair, Robin Vanderwall was the logical candidate to be elected to the office of chair. But beyond that, Robin is another whose thoughts and actions are focused on the good of NARSOL and how to better serve the people who look to us for help.

Robin is no stranger to leadership roles in NARSOL and related organizations. He is the founder and president of Vivante Espero, NARSOL's foundation. He is co-founder of our North Carolina chapter, NCRSOL. He is NARSOL's designated parliamentarian, keeping us on the straight and narrow in our meetings. He has served on many committees and is head of the very important conference operations committee.

We expect Robin's time as chair to be – not Paul's, for Robin will make it his own, but like Paul's – dedicated to the good of NARSOL and to help advance our organization in serving the men and women and families for whom we exist.

Before the first meeting with Robin as chair, he said:

Paul Shannon has been—and continues to be—the guidon bearer for NARSOL's advocacy. His dedication to the goals we seek is steadfast and unwavering. He has guided NARSOL from its inception with a combination of dogged determination, moral vision, and a standard of humility that is terribly lacking

among leaders today. I do not assume the mantel of chair with any thought of replacing Paul's legacy. But I will give it everything I've got on all scores. This movement—NARSOL itself—is never to be defined by any single person's charisma, charm, or vainglory. And I will work hard to model the type of leadership I have always believed is most capable of the results we seek: emptying out one's self in the service of others. This is the example Paul has set for us, and this is the path I will continue to walk.

Loyalty; dedication; fervor; devotion; honesty. These are the qualities that Paul brought to his role as NARSOL's chair, and these same qualities guide Robin as well as he assumes the position on NARSOL's board.