**Perry Speech [EZ Speech No. 16479]**

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Remarks by Mr. Sean Perry upon receiving the “Unsung Community Hero” award from the Downtown Clusters Geriatric Day Care Center.

ladies and gentlemen . . . [names/titles of other distin-guished guests] . . . and especially to you, thomye cave, for that very kind introduction . . .

i’m both honored and humbled to be this year’s recipient of the clusters center’s *“unsung community hero”* award, but i must tell you in all honesty that having my name on any award right next to the word “hero” feels a little strange to me. i don’t think of myself a hero at all. some of the men i served with in the [unit] of the air force, and other soldiers I knew in my 20-odd years of military service, were heros. those who gave, as lincoln said, “*the last full measure of devotion*” — these were heros. they saw what had to be done and they did it.

under fire . . . at huge personal risk . . . and too often at the cost of their own lives.

so no . . . with all due respect and the deepest gratitude for the recognition . . . i am not a hero. “unsung,” maybe — at least up until now; but not a hero.

what i *do* share with a lot of true heros, perhaps, is the vision to see clearly what needed to be done, and then doing what i could to see that it *gets* done.

five years ago, as the calendar of my life flipped into its second half-century, i began becoming a lot more aware than ever i was as a “young” man of the unique and inexorable and impossibly daunting challenges of getting old in this country. as many have observered before me, “*growing old ain’t for the timid.”* Especially if you’re growing old in a less-priviledged, underseved part of town. *especially* for the elderly poor, growing old’s really kind of a bitch.

however, it’s not that there weren’t any senior services available. i found out that there were actually quite a lot of agencies out there offering help to the aging. But there didn’t seem to be any single place — no central clearinghouse or “portal” — through which seniors could get information about all the services and resources they might be eligible for . . . how they should access these services . . . how they could find useful and unbiased information about their healthcare options . . . and generally how to keep abreast of developments in senior healthcare throughout the metro d.c. area.

that’s why i started *the senior zone* radio program on wycb-AM, as an accessable and empathic radio voice of reverence, care, and advocacy for those in the twilight of their lives. and no . . . i didn’t have an ounce of broadcasting experience in my life up to that point. what i knew was military service and insurance sales, not radio. but god gave me wonderful teachers, great sponsors and partners, and an[a] absolutely [HELLUVA] terrific audience. so all y’all here, and all of our listeners out in radioland, have as much title to this award as i have!

which is precisely why i’m hereby inviting you — all of you . . . here in the live audience and everyone at home — to take the next step with me and help me launch a new age of awareness, a new age of enlightenment, a ***new age of reverance for our elders***.

let us dedicate ourselves to a two-part mission of, one, finding *better* ways to care for those of our senior citizens who really can’t take care of themselves; and then number two, finding *more* ways to help the happy, hale, and hardy seniors in our community contribute *to* our community in useful, meaningful ways — to help them still to be productive, and maybe even earn a few bucks into the bargain.

first and foremost, we’ve gotta take care of our senior veterans. no . . . their lives and limbs aren’t *inherently* more valuable than anyone else’s lives and limbs; but those veterans gave *their* lives and limbs for *our* freedom and the liberties we all cherish. i think they deserve top priority. i only hope and pray that the scandals in which the v.a. was so recently emmbroiled are well in the past, as are the unconscionable waiting periods that wounded veterans needing urgent care have had to endure routinely at the hands of the vetearans administration.

we’ve also got to do better collectively in keeping our elderly poor off the merry-go-round of emergency admissions, minor crimes, slumming on the street, and ending up back in jail. every caregiver, every law enforcement officer, every prison official, every parole officer, is well aware that this merry-go-round is a fact of living in our city today, and in cities all over america, for that matter. and so all i can do is ask — to borrow a quote: when are we gonna ***stop this insanity??!!***

well, none of us here, either as individuals or as part of a helping or caregiving organization, can stop this shamefull madnes. not on our own, anyway; and i’m not even sure, to begin with, that meaningful reform of elder services to the poor is within the reach of *any* single community, since the funding for most of these services ultimately comes down from the feds. We can make our voices heard, whenever there might be somebody listening. but beyond that . . . i dunno . . .

but i think there’s certainly *one* area in which everyone in our community can be directly instrumental in launch ing a *“new age of reverance for the elderly”* — and that is very simply to . . . join my campaign to: “*hire a geezer!”*

that’s right; you heard me: hire a geezer. hire an old person. as long as the geezer’s not a wheezer, hire someone who knows a thing or two, someone who’s been there and done that — around the block a *couple* of times, at least. some-one who doesn’t have to be taught either courtesy or simple math. someone who doesn’t require many perks and who’ll work for peanuts. what’s not to like in this kind of hire?

but wait — as those t.v. commercials say — there’s more!

seniors make great mentors, because smart seniors, who’ve been there and done that, very often like to share their knowledge and expertise to help shape the next generation of professionals in their fields. why do we throw all this hard-earned knowledge away? *hire a geezer!* a geezer’s expertise is a terrible thing to waste!

seniors are good role models, too. whether they’re part-timers, full-time staffters, or outside consul-tants, older workers tend to be hard workers — partly because that’s the only way most of ‘em know, and partly just to show the younger guys they’ve still got it. looking for a morale booster, a behavior modeler, a motivator? i’m tellin’ ya: *hire a geezer!*

seniors who’ve worked in the business world have seen, dealt with, and sometimes found themselves in the middle of, all manner of personality conflicts, turf wars, juristictional battles, and intellectual skirmishes. some of those old pros who survived the corporate wars often turn out to be pretty good peacemakers, with an almost magical ability to smooth the waters in any type of confrontational situation — often with no blooshed at all! so when you need a bridge over troubled waters, i’m tellin’ ya: *hire a geezer!*

let’s launch a new age of reverance for seniors by finding them meaningful work to do . . . dignified and uplifting work . . .useful and productive work. we owe it to them. we owe it to ourselves. we owe it to history.

let me close by acknowledging the fact that the unsung hero award you’re bestowing on me tonight is very truly a group award. that group consists, first and foremost, of the most wonderful and supportive family a man could ever pray for: [first name], my wife; my kids, [names]; and of course gramma [your mother’s name]. [to your family] thanks for everything, you guys!

[add apppropriate thank-you’s and shout-outs as required, being as specific about their respective contributions to you and/or the radio show, etc., as possible.] without your generous support and encouragement, the senior zone could never have achieved the success and recognition it has in the community. i look forward to continuing our work together in serving senior citizens throughout the metropolitan area, and in making a new age of reverance for the elderly a reality, at least in our neighborhood.

and with that, ladies and gentlemen, all i can say once again is . . . thank you; thank you from the bottom of my heart for this terrific honor.

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