

Richard “Gordy” Bunch

An American Hero, Insurance Entrepreneur, Unpaid Public Servant

A SHINING STAR: Like any shining star, it is difficult to pinpoint which facet shines brightest when we attempt to describe Richard “Gordy” Bunch III. When peering at the heavens through a telescope, it is the convergence of a multitude of luminescent facets that illuminates each star for us. Similarly, the individuals we dare to see as “American Heroes,” worthy of our special recognition, are made up of many facets in their chosen field. Gordy Bunch is a multitasking master. Aside from the fact that, at age 42, Gordy Bunch has protected our sovereign borders, founded an innovative nationally-ranked insurance services agency, and that he simultaneously serves as an effective public servant for his community, being a hero appears to be a perennial, albeit unintentional, natural state for Richard “Gordy” Bunch.

COAST GUARD HERO: He arrived on the insurance scene with a chest full of decorations from the U.S. Coast Guard and even a special Meritorious Unit Commendation with one Gold Star from Vice Admiral Martin H. Daniell, Commander of the Coast Guard Pacific Area. Filled with patriotic zeal, he cared about the impact on his country when the Gulf War broke out. At age 19, he and a buddy drove from their College Station, Texas homes to San Diego where Gordy volunteered for active duty with the U.S. Coast Guard. Over the next four years, he learned to face adversity head-on, conducting hurricane missions; rescuing ships and refugees from frigid rolling seas; intercepting drug smugglers and human traffickers who were piloting slave ships bound for American shores. But heroes come in many forms and stand out for many reasons. Perhaps as a harbinger of future achievements, but specifically for reorganizing purchasing procedures at his duty station, and saving the Coast Guard and his country time and considerable sums of money, Gordy was awarded one of the Coast Guard’s highest honors, its Achievement Medal. Later, because of his active duty service in war time he was also awarded the United States’ National Defense Service Medal.

INSURANCE PRODIGY: His parents had provided a comfortable middle-class life for their two sons, but when Gordy separated from the Coast Guard he had already felt the call of entrepreneurship and public service. With an honorable discharge from the military, and instilled with respect for personal and organizational discipline, he decided to navigate business opportunities in the wide world of insurance. He did his insurance “basic training” as a Texas Farm Bureau agent. He quickly moved up as an Associate General Agent with American National and then as Manager of Financial Services and Retail Director with Prudential. However, Gordy was still infused with the dream that sparked the inspiration and motivation that had earned him the Coast Guard awards. He would learn a task or a procedure and, again and again, his inner voice would say: “There is a Better Way.”

TWFG FOUNDER: Gordy is the founder, president and CEO of The Woodlands Financial Group, a successful business built on a single word: *"Caring."* In 2001, by now with a wife and children, he used his life savings of \$10,000 to launch The Woodlands Financial Group and the TWFG insurance services agency. He immediately was faced with challenges that would prove his mettle. TWFG's first year of operation was also the beginning of the worst decade in our country and the insurance industry since World War II. Hurricanes, tornadoes, residential mold, floods, the tragedy of September 11, and an international financial crisis, all placed seemingly overwhelming obstacles in his path. Not only was he determined that his business would survive, but also those customers he had insured and who had helped him to launch his agency, now needed his help. His response to the hurricanes and floods was to travel to the scene of the disaster, knock on the doors of his customers, sometimes standing in water and shards of glass, writing TWFG checks on-the-spot to provide immediate relief to those most impacted by the disasters.

PERSONAL HEROISM: He was a hero in the military, serving his country and finding more efficient and economical ways to operate. He launched a successful insurance business by being a hero to his customers. But, it was the Thornberry commitment that enabled him to rise to even more heroic proportions. His wife, Michelle, is the daughter of Nancy and Fred Thornberry. Dr. Thornberry, a prominent Texas A&M agricultural professor, suffered cataclysmic injuries in an automobile accident that left him as a quadriplegic. Gordy came to the rescue once again, in a gesture of personal heroics, he insisted that Michelle's mother and father move into the Bunch home where they could personally care for them and he also arranged for 24-hour nursing care for the tragically afflicted father. That arrangement continues to this day with Gordy, his wife, three young sons, and the Thornberry s all sharing the ups and downs of their lives together.

UNPAID PUBLIC SERVANT: One would think a life so filled with success, still building a business and helping others, would have no more time to contribute. But Gordy felt the need to pay back his community for his unique success and the blessings bestowed upon his family. His business and home are both located in The Woodlands, Texas, one of the nation's premier master-planned communities. The Woodlands is on its way to becoming an important Texas municipality with more than 108,000 residents and 2,000 businesses. In the interim, residents adopted a Township form of government that required seven board members to serve as the equivalent of a city council. Gordy put his name on the ballot for one of the elected at-large and unpaid positions. Although not politically active, he was easily elected to public office as a member of the board of directors of The Woodlands Township. One of his first actions was to draw upon his knowledge of insurance to discover that the community was under-covered and overcharged. He courageously challenged the status quo and launched a professional and independent study of a multi-million dollar premium – disqualifying himself and TWFG from any share of reformulated coverages and premiums. He definitely reached "hometown hero" status with kudos and plaudits from his fellow board members and the Township staff, as well

as the media and knowledgeable residents for achieving \$800,000 dollar in annual savings and more appropriate coverage for The Woodlands Township's considerable assets set in a 28,000-acre forest. As elected Treasurer he initiated a pay-down of \$14.3 million in public debt, saving taxpayers \$5.7 million in interest charges and \$1.5 million in the Township's annual budget, while enabling a cut in Township real estate taxes for two consecutive years. He is definitely a hero to the 35,000 homeowners in The Woodlands and it is one of the reasons why he was just re-elected this month (November 2014) without an opponent or opposing words. He was also re-elected by his fellow board members to be Treasurer of the Township and was elected as Chairman of The Woodlands Convention and Visitors Bureau which reported mid-year sales tax results of \$30,915,238 and Hotel Tax revenues of \$4,657,172.

ENTREPRENEUR-OF-THE-YEAR: Bunch has grown The Woodlands Financial Group from that original investment of \$10,000 in 2001 to \$337 million in premiums in 2013 with more than 300 branches in 21 states plus 3,000 affiliates in 38 states serving 250,000 customers. TWFG writes policies in 49 U.S. states from its headquarters in The Woodlands. His business success and community activities resulted in his selection as a finalist for Gulf Coast Entrepreneur-of-the-Year and in the Top 10 of Insurance Journal's independent Property and Casualty agencies

IRON MAN: As an IronMan participant and sponsor, Gordy believes in physical fitness, so TWFG supports healthy public events through his TWFG company. TWFG is title sponsor for the Gran Fondo bicycle race benefitting the Houston Medical Center Orchestra as well as Multiple Sclerosis with \$187,000. The TWFG Muddy Trails Bash series of fun runs for kids and a host of charitable organizations. Other beneficiaries of TWFG's "Caring" policy are American Heart Association, Susan G. Breast Cancer Foundation, Barnabus Group, Interfaith of The Woodlands, Toys for Tots, CASA Child Advocacy, College of the Ozarks, University of North Texas, Texas A&M University, University of Houston-Downtown Advisory Board; The Woodlands Waterway Arts Council; Fellowship of Christian Athletes; Texas Rush (Kid's Soccer), Young Life, The Woodlands United Methodist Church, and JROTC. The family attends United Methodist Church of The Woodlands. A final example of Gordy's "heroism" is when he was contacted and asked to help with bicycles for children who were housed with their abused mothers in a safe haven communal home. Gordy asked his 75 headquarters employees to bring in their used bikes from their homes to donate. When the total count was not enough to take care of all the kids, Gordy called in a TWFG intern, handed him a credit card, and said "Go out and buy three more new bikes." Gordy disregards monetary success and recognition, because he believes a real hero is someone who cares enough not to disappoint a dozen children who are already in a compromised position in life.

SUMMARY: Gordy continues to demonstrate a high level of care for his country, his business, his industry, his customers, his employees, community, neighbors, the Christian church, his own and everyone else's children, while he meticulously manages a personal journey that already deserves to be marked as a life well-spent.