

**Tell us a little about your family.**

**Thornton:** I married Beth Chalmers 38 years ago. We met at the University of Georgia in Athens and were married before we graduated. We [have] two lovely children. Our daughter, Darcy, is 36, and our son, Ben, is 29.

**And you have a dog. You've got to mention Lucy...**

**Thornton:** We have a grand dog, a black Lab who is in her fifth year. We bought her from a trainer out of St. Cloud, Minn. She's trained for ducks and pheasants and loves to hunt.

**You're a man of faith and obviously a man who believes in having a strong family.**

**Thornton:** I have a very strong belief that without having a humble appreciation for the blessings that we all have in our lives, and without being able to express a thanks for that, that it's very difficult to be centered. I also have a belief that faith is very important as we go through the struggles in life and that there are a lot of things that we can't handle on our own. If we ask for guidance then we'll be given guidance. I try to think about that every day.

**Who introduced you to hunting?**

**Thornton:** I started hunting with my dad when I was big enough to tag along. I got my first shotgun when I was 10. I still have it, a single-barrel .410. The [receiver] on it is a little bit worn out. (laughs) We raised beagles and did a lot of rabbit hunting. We did a lot of deer hunting. We hunted just about anything you could hunt.

**What influence has hunting had on your life?**

**Thornton:** Hunting led to my appreciation for conservation. As a young man it was so easy to hunt. We had plenty of habitat. As I got into my 20s and 30s and began to move around, I didn't have access to hunt. As I got a little bit older, I was fortunate enough to be able to buy some land, and the first thing I wanted to do was to improve habitat. I began to read everything I could about habitat management.

**Given your credentials, what attracted you to the CEO position of the NWTF?**

**Thornton:** It felt like a calling. When I became aware of the search, I discussed it with my wife. We were deciding what to do with the rest of our lives. I thought, *Here's an opportunity to work in an area that is grounded around conservation, supports hunting heritage, supports Second Amendment rights, things that are very important to me.* I could not have scripted something that better fit the things that are important to me.

**How would you describe your leadership style?**

**Thornton:** I would hope that someone else would describe my leadership style as very participative. I think I have good listening skills [and] the ability to synthesize a lot of different viewpoints. [It's] a very active style. I believe that after you've done your homework, it's important that you take decisions and move with some speed after the right amount of deliberation. It's important that an organization see a leader as having the conviction to make strong, appropriate decisions and to put them quickly into place.

**Why do you believe in the NWTF?**

**Thornton:** I think the mission is right on target. The mission of conservation in terms of restoring and maintaining habitat for the wild turkey is right over the target. But it's not just about the wild turkey. Everything we do benefits multiple species. That appeals to me greatly.

**Let's talk about that mission. What are your thoughts about the NWTF mission of conserving the wild turkey and preserving**

**our hunting heritage?**

**Thornton:** Several people have asked me what aspect of the mission we'll be emphasizing. Will it be conservation or hunting heritage?



New NWTF CEO George Thornton learns more about the museum from Stephanie Drennan, the Federation's Interpretive Programs Coordinator.

The answer to that is yes. You can't have one without the other.

I love the way the mission is crafted and the way it's expressed. Everybody involved in creating that over the last 35 years was thoughtful and knowledgeable about what needed to be done in terms of restoring the wild turkey. They also began to realize what was happening in our greater society in terms of a de-emphasis on hunting or negative impressions of hunting.

**What is your vision for the NWTF's future?**

**Thornton:** I see a very, very bright future. I don't buy into the notion that we have completed the conservation mission. I'm very conscious of how quickly we could go backwards if there's not a loud voice and a lot of energy directed at keeping that part of our mission at the forefront. I see a continuing challenge there.

I do not believe in resting on our laurels. Our laurels are considerable, but we need to stay steady and