



December 12, 2019

ONE OF A KIND



The southern drawl is just one distinctive feature Leon Shaifer shares with the world. To know Leon, you must understand the importance of tradition; to not gain too much of an ego but have enough bravery to take initiative; and honor those who came before us as you leave a legacy behind. Leon's legacy was what earned him the recognition of the NEMA's Presidential Award. The third time in NEMA's 45-year history the award has been granted to a person who was not a state director.

No one presented this best than NEMA Past President, Brad Richy (ID) during Leon's recognition: "Leon, we thank you! Words cannot truly express what you have meant to the evolution of the compact from the early days in a room of state staff drafting the language to the mature, tried and true mutual aid system that it is today. Because of your work, we can say with all honesty that lives have been saved through EMAC. Your legacy is a lasting one that will continue making a difference for years and years to come."

The Man

Leon's politeness and willingness to challenge others to be successful stands out as much as his own successes have. Cris McCombs (Haggerty) adds, "The super power within your NEMA membership is the people. You have untethered access to some of the brightest and best in our industry and if you are truly blessed, those same role models end up being your most cherished friends." Cris and Leon become cherished friends as they advised each other in their careers. Leon began his public service in 1974 as an appointed director for Coahoma County (MS) Emergency Management Agency. From there he found his way to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency as the Director of the Plans and Operations Division and later became the Deputy Director of the agency. Cris moves on to say: "I remember him telling me to

always trust my instincts. He would continue to be a trusted advisor, brilliant mentor and most importantly, cherished friend. Leon instinctively knows when to lean in and when to pull back. Thanks to the miracle of friendship, he was always there for me artfully knowing when I needed him to lean in and when to quietly sit in the shadows and cheer the loudest in support.”

The Storyteller

Leon is enriched in history through experience, studies, and family tales and has an impeccable way to share. Jack Jowett, EMAC Advisor, taught the EMAC course with Leon at EMI for the past 15 years. Being so close to Gettysburg unleashed family historical accounts as Leon acted as a tour guide along the various sites. Jack shares: “Leon is proud of his southern heritage and is an expert on the Battle of Gettysburg where some of his ancestors fought among the troops in General Barksdale’s Brigade from Mississippi. We would always find time to cross the Mason-Dixon Line and head to the battlefield in Gettysburg where Leon would act as a tour guide. We had a tradition of smoking a cigar somewhere on the battlefield. We spent many a fine ‘cigar night’ there alternating each visit between the Confederate and Union lines.”

The EMAC legend

“Leon is EMAC’s most valued advisor and without a doubt the preeminent expert on EMAC in the nation,” touts Angela Copple, EMAC Director. Many affectionally refer to Leon as the grandfather of EMAC. Leon retorts, “All I did was be in the right place at the right time. [EMAC] is what I’ve enjoyed doing.” Leon was right where he needed to be. In 1992, he served on a working group that developed the Southern Regional Emergency Management Compact. Seventeen states passed those articles into law. After the Attorneys Generals of those states determined that the agreement could be used by all states, it turned to be a no-brainer. In 1995, Leon worked with then NEMA President Richard Andrews (CA) to solidify administration of EMAC by NEMA. The first EMAC Mission in October of 1995 between Florida and Mississippi for Hurricane Opal bears the signature of Leon Shaifer on the EMAC Request for Assistance form. When Leon retired from state government in 2004, he still served on EMAC in an advisory role. Angela adds, “As the Compact has evolved and new technologies have been integrated to accelerate the mutual aid process, EMAC has stayed true to the intent of the founding fathers in very large part because of Leon. His passion has been our guide.”

There is no better way to conclude this tribute than with words from Leon himself. As he stood in the limelight of this major professional achievement, he took the moment to do what he does best:

"Let me charge the State Directors. You all have the responsibility in law defined by the appointment of your Governor to be responsible for the 13 articles of EMAC law in your state. We need your total commitment and support – providing staff and supporting your staff to make sure EMAC works

according to the founding fathers and the law. You are the key to starting the engine and maintaining it. . .To you directors, EMAC coordinators and Designated Contacts, I challenge you to go forward in spirit of EMAC."

- Leon Shaifer

nemaweb.org



Copyright NEMA 2019. All rights reserved.