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Leadership Means Giving Those Around You Everything They Need to Succeed

Lynn Budd
Director
Wyoming Office of
Homeland Security



Being involved with NEMA as a Director and prior to your current role; what are your thoughts on how the association has grown? And how has that growth benefited you?

Being a relatively new emergency management director, NEMA and the relationships I have been fortunate enough to make, have been invaluable to me. I don't think we can ever underestimate the value of personal (and in-person) relationships. What I love about NEMA and emergency management is the incredible amount of *support, comradery and humility found in this profession*. We are all here to learn, support one another and have a good time. Being in the west, NEMA is critical to keeping us connected with the pulse of the nation and allowing us to be engaged and a part of shaping policy on the national level.

In thinking of the time you worked with your family in the management of the Red Canyon Ranch (WY) for the Nature Conservancy, what aspects of the experience in working at the ranch do you bring to your current team at the Office of Homeland Security?

Almost everything.

I would not be who I am today if it were not for my husband and the experiences we had on the ranch. It sounds cliché but it is true. He asked more of me than I thought I had to give, with the greatest confidence that I would succeed, because in most situations I had to succeed. There was no time for self-doubt because I was the one that had to solve the problem, no different than anyone else, man or woman, who was put into those situations.

Living and working on a ranch is like being in an almost daily state of emergency, and much is expected of the matriarch of the ranch. *The expectation is to ensure not only that everyone is fed, but that everyone working on the ranch has everything they need to succeed*. There are often situations where you have to solve problems quickly, and away from normal resources, so you get very creative and you learn to focus on the problem in small parts and find the resources you need to solve the problem. Emergency management works very much the same way; there is always a plan, but more often than not things change and you have to adjust to those changes in order to succeed.

In what ways has being the recipient of the Women of Influence award for Government, Military, and Law (2018) influenced your leadership style?

This award was quite humbling as the previous recipients make up the selection committee. I have always just tried to do the best job I could at whatever job was given to me. This honor changed me in that it helped me to realize that I need to understand the impact I can have on those around me and those that come after me. I did not think of myself as someone who had something to give other than doing the best job I could to support others, but now I believe that I have a responsibility to empower others, especially women, to believe in themselves and know they can achieve whatever they believe they can.

The thread of your livelihood is community involvement. The longstanding devotion of volunteering for the Public Relations Committee of the Award-Winning Cheyenne Frontier Days is one of the many ways you give back to your community outside of your public service focused career. What is the benefit to you as a member of the committee? And, more fun, what is your favorite rodeo event; why is that a favorite?

Being a volunteer with Cheyenne Frontier Days (CFD) is a complete honor. This show, the largest outdoor rodeo in the world, is put on by 2,500 volunteers, and it is steeped with western tradition, and family. There are 10 committees, and a general committee that commit hours year-round to make this show a success. The volunteers raise funds annually for the Scholarship Fund for volunteers and their dependents to attend college, and to provide for the Crisis Fund for those volunteers that are faced with a tragic or catastrophic loss. All these activities bring volunteers together to not only support CFD, but to support each other. It's a family. There are many similar organizations within emergency management. We support each other and we give all we have to the communities we support – and we find strength in each other.

My favorite rodeo event is steer wrestling. Of course I love the bull riding too, but steer wrestling really pits a cowboy against an animal where the strength is within them – I admire that.

Since you and your husband have a love of travel, what place would be your wanderlust and why?

We love to find new adventures and learn new things. Australia and New Zealand are on the list, but we would love to explore the states east of the Mississippi, and learn more about the great history that is found there.

Between you and your husband, who has caught the largest Walleye? When and how did it happen? And was there a trophy involved?

Well, my husband has caught the largest Walleye – but I wasn't with him so it doesn't count! We are very competitive when we are fishing, but we still support each other – even if I catch more fish! Frankly, it is more about just being out on the water and finding that peace. Balance is important, in emergency management you have to find those times to decompress and remember why you do what you do.

There's something so special about a woman who dominates in a man's world. It takes a certain grace, strength, intelligence, fearlessness, and the nerve to never take no for an answer.

-Rihanna



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