

REMEMBERING LEON

COWBOY, COMMISSIONER, & FRIEND

I can't imagine an Idaho without Leon in it. I don't want to, but I have to because it's happened: he's moved on. Leon left us this week, felled by cancer too soon after retiring from the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission.

Leon was an Irishman - you knew by the twinkle in his eye and his ornery disposition. Leon loved to tease. When he went before the Senate Ag Committee for his confirmation to the Commission, he couldn't resist poking the good senators, telling them he'd been told to leave his boots, rope, and spurs outside in the truck. They were charmed and voted to recommend his appointment unanimously.

He was a fair man, a thinking man. He heard you out before making up his mind and once convinced that we were on the right track, he was unfailingly loyal. He'd been a District Supervisor for a long time before he was appointed by Governor Otter. In truth, as a Supervisor I think he had to rethink some of his perceptions about the Commission, but we grew on him. His perspective, demeanor, and insight was invaluable to us.

Leon loved his cows and good horses. He read my stories in Range Magazine and told me about Ben Greene's books on horse trading. He shod his own horses and promised if I hauled up to Grangeville he'd show me the most beautiful high mountain lakes with great fishing. I regret I never made it up there.

He worked eradicating noxious weeds in his county - on the range and in the forest. He typically missed our June meetings because they were spraying weeds by helicopter. He loved his job, I think.

Leon was no fan of chicken. We knew better than to suggest a restaurant that couldn't give him a good steak. Our deputy attorney general remembered last night that he wondered if a restaurant he



Leon on a Tri-State Commission Tour in Oregon, wearing that yellow shirt. One of them, anyway.

was going to would serve beef sushi.

A few years ago we toured a large dairy with a group near Jerome and while watching them milk we all got splattered with cow poop. Leon's crisp light yellow Wrangler shirt was covered, but by dinner that evening it was fresh and crisp again. He finally confessed that he had bought a bunch of the shirts when a Western shop went out of business - over 30 of them. He'd hang them in his car and swap them out as needed.

Leon loved his wife and kids and his place near Grangeville so when he told the Board he was stepping down to spend more time with them and horseback in the mountains he loved we weren't surprised. Our paths crossed a few times after that in Boise and he was happy. From time to time I'd call and ask his opinion.

It was always solid, always sound. Always appreciated.

Last fall I called with a thorny problem and was stunned when he told me he'd just learned he had cancer. He was at that point optimistic, and I really thought he'd beat it. So did he. But he didn't, and now I'm left thinking about what a fine man, a good friend, so many of us have lost.

Idaho was built by men like Leon. Good men who loved her mountains, their families and friends, and good horses. Goodbye, my friend. I'm so glad our paths went parallel for a time. My sincerest condolences to the family. His Commission family appreciates that you shared him with us.

Teri Murrison, Commission Administrator

LEON'S OBITUARY

IN THE LEWISTON TRIBUNE, MARCH 17, 2020

Leon Slichter, 71, slipped quietly away March 12, 2020, at his home with the love of his family surrounding him. Pancreatic cancer and chemotherapy took its toll and finally released him to God.

He was born March 9, 1949, to Samuel L. Slichter and Melva (Lanningham) Slichter in Grangeville. He attended Grangeville Elementary through the sixth grade and transferred to Prairie Elementary and graduated from Prairie High School in Cottonwood in 1966. He married Sheryl Ann Currin on Dec. 28, 1968, at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Cottonwood.

Being raised on the small family ranch southwest of Grangeville, he always stayed a cattleman and "cowboy," his life-long dream. He enjoyed raising his herd of horned Hereford cattle and riding his "hoss" from the ranch, Remuda of 16.

At the age of 18, Leon began his horse-shoeing career, first as a young cowhand, then later for the rest of his horse friends across the county. He worked on 900 horses the year he was 50 and retired from shoeing 10 years later. He still enjoyed shoeing his own horses up until last year.

Being a horseshoer kept him very busy, along with the ranch chores he always enjoyed. In addition, he spent more than 20 years with the Idaho County Weed Control as a "professional herbicide applicator" weed warrior. He truly enjoyed trying to protect and preserve his Salmon and Snake river canyons.

Leon's life was full as he was also involved in and a member of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Knights of Columbus, Past President of SPP Home and School Association, 4-H leader of Fenn Livestock Club for 13 years, past president of Idaho County Cattle Association, Idaho State Soil and Water Conservation Commission in Boise, Idaho County Soil and Water Conservation Board for 25 years and Board of Directors of the Idaho State Cattle Association.

Leon did his best to truly enjoy life with some of his favorites: the color blue, his



Palomino horse named Peso and blue merle stock dog, Silver. His favorite song was "Danny Boy," the singer Rex Allen Sr., the movie "The Quiet Man" and the scripture Psalm 24.

Special highlights in his life were his back-country horseback hunting, fishing trips with his family and western cowboy poetry, especially by his friend, Baxter Black.

"When I am dead and gone, and you hang my well-worn kack, I want you to remember, I never sold my saddle, and I never bred 'em black."

Leon left behind a loving family: wife Sheryl Ann, of 51 years; daughter Maureen (Ben); three sons, Joseph (Michelle), Nicholas (Heather) and Clancy (Becky); and siblings Kathleen Vopat, Ron and Allan Slichter. He was also blessed with 11 grandchildren, Jessica, Connor, Maria, Kace, Wesley, Madison, Ryan, Brooklynn, McKenna and Maverick; and many nieces and nephews.

Leon was preceded in death by his

granddaughter, Hope Terese Munger; his parents; baby sister Sareta; and two brothers, Larry and Jon.

A rosary will be held at 1 p.m. Saturday, March 21, at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic gymnasium, followed by a celebration of life Mass at 1:30 p.m. The burial will be at the Holy Cross Cemetery in Keuterville and a private family gathering will be held later.

Arrangements are by Blackmer Funeral Home of Grangeville. If you would like to help the family, please grace St. Jude's Children's Hospital, P.O. Box, Memphis, TN 3801-0050 with your kindness.

A last thought in Leon's own words, from The Man from Buzzard Mountain, "When I am dead and gone, and you hang my well-worn kack, I want you to remember, I never sold my saddle, and I never bred 'em black."

Happy trails to you, Dad.

Thanks to Elaine Sonnen at the Idaho District for sharing Leon's Obituary.