

Bob Shannon, beloved family man and respected DOE manager

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Bob Shannon and Bill Vaden at work – both close friends and long time co-workers

Recently I wrote in this column regarding the 60th anniversary of OSTI (Office of Scientific and Technical Information), noting the worldwide impact of that organization in the realm of scientific research information storage, retrieval and management. Included in the feedback I received was an e-mail from John Shannon and then one from his brother Lee Shannon.

Although both e-mails were complimentary of the article on OSTI, the primary subject of their e-mails was their dad, Bob Shannon. Bill Vaden was also prominent in their comments and suggestions. In subsequent exchanges of e-mail and through materials shared with me by John, the following story has emerged. It is a story of a family man too soon taken from his loved ones and an internationally respected executive who remained dedicated to his career and exhibited superior performance in both roles.

Bob Shannon (Robert Lee Shannon) died Saturday, April 22, 1978, at age 56, while working in his garden at home. His untimely death shocked his family, his coworkers and all who knew him. One person who

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was significantly impacted by the loss was Bill Vaden, who said at the time, "The loss to me personally is particularly tragic since we have been both friends and coworkers since college days."

At the time of his death, Bob was the head of the Department of Energy's Technical Information Center in Oak Ridge, known officially, when he became the head in January 1959, as the Atomic energy Commission's Technical Information Service Extension and known now as DOE's Office of Scientific and Technical Information. He was an internationally known energy information expert, serving as the American liaison officer to the International Atomic Energy Agency for its International Nuclear Information System.

The TIC was a nationally and internationally respected organization noted for its unexcelled information products and services. Bob had been with the organization since 1946 with three interruptions, one to serve in the Korean War, one to work for a few months in the Feed Materials Division of Oak Ridge Operations and one at the Atomic Energy Commission's headquarters in Washington, DC. In recognition of his dedicated service during this special assignment to the AEC headquarters, Bob was awarded the AEC's Superior Performance Award.

He saw the organization move from producing the definitive 70-volume series on the Manhattan Project to the Nuclear Science Abstracts and into the early stages of computerized information management. During this time, Bill Vaden worked along side Bob, serving as the Deputy Manager for the organization for many years.

Bill continued to work for the organization after Bob's untimely death and ultimately published the history of the growth and expansion into the full blown information age giant that is today's OSTI. His publication, *The Oak Ridge Technical Information Center, a trailblazer in federal documentation* was published in 1992 and can be located online at: <http://www.osti.gov/promo/doeosti11673.pdf> . I found it most helpful in writing about OSTI's history.

Bob Shannon was born in Danville, KY in 1922 and grew up in Rockwood, TN. He attended Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, TN, graduating with a degree in Physics in 1946. Interrupting his college years, he volunteered for military duty in the Navy during World War II, participating in the taking of Iwo Jima. He remained active in the Naval Reserves rising to Lt. Commander and commanding officer of the naval reserve base in Knoxville, TN.

Bob was a loyal alumnus and supporter of Tennessee Tech. He was awarded Tennessee Tech's Distinguished Alumni award posthumously in 1979. His family established the Robert L. Shannon Jr. Physics Scholarship Endowment in his honor. This scholarship remains in effect and continues to assist students annually.

One letter from a recipient of the scholarship states, "...I received the Robert L. Shannon Jr. scholarship and I would like to thank you for your donations and assure you that your contribution is being put to good use. This scholarship will help pay for my tuition. I love it here at Tech and without this scholarship, I would have to finish school at a community college back home. Thanks to your contribution I should be able to graduate from Tech. Right now I'm in the middle of my fourth semester with a 3.5 GPA. I am a teaching assistant for an astronomy lab. I think I would like to continue to major in physics and hopefully work at an observatory after I graduate. I have applied for several summer internships and research assistant positions at observatories around the country. If astronomy doesn't work out for me, I will find something else that excites me and start pursuing that. I want to thank you again for your contribution."

John Shannon met the writer of the above note of thanks and said that he was convinced the scholarship made the difference in this young man finishing college or not. John said of this encounter, "It really hits

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home to have a lasting legacy that dad would have never said a word about.” The scholarship is a way to keep his dad’s memory fresh and to help students who are struggling to finish college...yes, what a great legacy!

There are two notes included in the materials John gave me that I would like to mention. One is a letter from Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington requesting Bob to “join me for lunch at the Alexander Motor Inn in Oak Ridge.” I must use this as an example of the importance of the historic Guest House or Alexander Inn to Oak Ridge’s history. It was THE place where dignitaries came when they visited Oak Ridge.

The second note dated May 12, 1965, comes from General Leslie R. Groves who states, “I was shocked to discover yesterday that I had not acknowledged your thoughtfulness in sending me the Russian translation of my book. I shall add it to my collection of mementoes for the grandchildren. I only hope they won’t have to learn the language some day. I do appreciate your kindness, Sincerely, Leslie R. Groves (signature in his own handwriting).”

For his dedicated service to the Atomic Energy Commission, Bob Shannon was awarded a certificate formally recognizing him as one of only 170 individuals who had served the AEC for the entirety of its existence from January, 1947, until December, 1974. He was also awarded a cash award for sustained superior performance advancing the AEC technical information objective of channeling scientific data generated in worldwide nuclear research and development to scientists, engineers, educators, students, and the general public.

As a final insight into the quality of his professional life, a letter he composed to his manager, Ed Brunenkant, upon Ed’s departure for another position, tells a lot about Bob Shannon.

He states,

“...I have come to know that there are few things that are absolutely true, but I know this one truth – your love and concern for this organization and its people. Above all else we will remember you for this.

- “We will remember your quest for excellence. As a result, we have excelled and I believe the world of science and technology is the better off on account of it.
- “We will remember you for the great quality of making us feel important – and we have achieved stature.
- “We will remember your praise for our accomplishments and your understanding of our failures.
- “We will remember you for continually seeking our counsel as we remember the times when you did not heed it.
- “We will remember your sense of humor and your enjoyment of your job and each day of life.
- “We will remember that you kept your burdens to yourself.

“Our decade of close association has seen strong disagreements on some points and equally strong mutual convictions on others. On balance, we made a good team. If we were starting over I am convinced we would again choose the same side and line up the same way.

“As you undertake a new assignment, I want you to know that you take with you the spirit of DTIE and our hope, admiration and affection.

“For you, Jeanette, and your children, I wish good health, good fortune, good times and God speed.

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Bill Vaden felt the above letter from Bob to Ed was a true indicator of how things were during the era when Bob Shannon led the organization that Bill dedicated his professional career to promoting. I agree.

Next week we will look at Bob Shannon from the eyes of his two sons, John and Lee.