

Bob Shannon's sons remember him with love and pride

D. Ray Smith | *Historically Speaking* | The Oak Ridger | November 6, 2007

Last week we looked at Bob Shannon's professional career at OSTI. This article will focus on his family life.

In addition to his outstanding professional career, Bob Shannon was also very much a family man. His youngest son, John, writes the following personal thoughts about his dad.

"As a boy, I had no clue what kid of work dad did, nor of the significance of that work. To me, he was just dad. He was always there at Boys Club games or to throw the ball. When I was a little kid we would sit on Friday nights and listen to the wildcats play the next victim on the old AM radio. He delighted in driving an old Chevy Corvair that he bought (after badgering for years) from Pete Helms across the street. He fixed that car up and got it to work again. We would drive to get groceries and dial in Mexico, St. Louis or Pittsburgh on the radio as he pulled the worn-down key out and drove with it in his pocket. I thought it was magic!

"We would sit in the front yard and talk about the planets, or stars, or try to name all the Presidents in order. He was always teaching. He taught me to use tools at an early age. I could saw, hammer, paint, chop wood, help garden (which was a big hobby of his). Looking back, I see that he was getting me ready to be a man and did it in a way that allowed me to be a child at the same time. Chores, yes! But he did it with fun and learning thrown in. Dad loved TTU football.



The Bob Shannon Family: Bob and Noroma are in the back. Becky (blonde) is on the left. John is in the middle front and Melinda is on the right. Lee is in the middle.

"Dad also had a very dry sense of humor and kept a list of strange but authenticated names. He would tell our grandmother that we had a banana plantation growing in our backyard (Scotch tape and kids hanging bananas to a tree, but she bought it). He had father Manny Reid at St. Stephens convinced that there was a missing 13th disciple. He could make you believe anything.

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"Most of all, he was a family man. He loved Tennessee and he loved Oak Ridge and all that it stood for. He would tell me stories of why Oak Ridge is important to the entire world. He loved being "home." He had multiple offers of substantial title, employment and income over the years. We could have lived in Washington, DC, Manhattan, Vienna, Boston, etc. But he turned down many jobs of great salary to stay "home" and finish his work with the AEC/DOE as well as raise us all in Oak Ridge.

"I'll always be proud of Oak Ridge and what is now called OSTI. I'm honored to have Bill and Maxine Vaden as my godparents. I'm very proud that they as well as dad, Lee and I all went to TTU and received our degrees. Most of all, I'm proud to be his son and my only regret is that he died so young and never got to see my children.

"At least they have a living legacy in OSTI!

Lee Shannon, Bob Shannon's oldest son writes the following memories of Oak Ridge and his dad, Bob Shannon.

"Mom and dad were both only children but John, my sisters and I grew up with hundreds of 'uncle's' and 'aunt's,' all from OSTI. It was a large but very tight-knit, close family that was doing work, both secret and non-secret, that had never been heard of before and was the front runner of many, many things that have come to be. This organization was a true team and the employees really helped and cared for each other. You would be surprised about how any of the folks that I came to know during those years. It was more than just work too. There were fishing trips, football games, gatherings at homes, helping each other work on their homes, cars, etc. and folks taking the kids everywhere.

"Many of the folks who worked at OSTI were local, they had served in the war together, gone to school with each other and their families were in the area. Dad was born in Danville, KY, but grew up in Rockwood, TN with much of the family in Morgan and Scott counties. He loved the area and would not leave unless he had to such as his naval service in World War II and Korea, which he continued in the reserve at Knoxville and retired as a Lt. Commander and Commander of the reserve center.

"Dad had many, many chances to leave. He was offered a Vice President position with McGraw-Hill, the President's position at Amherst College, many offers with the AEC to go to Washington, DC, and other locations but no way would he leave.

"Oak Ridge was and is a unique town. Everyone was making history and many were pioneers. I read in The Oak Ridger the other day about the Sports Hall of Fame. I had no idea there was such a thing.

"The article stated that the first four to be inducted were: Nick Orlando (for me, a teacher, coach, boss, and forever close family friend, along with his family); Shep Lauter (who didn't like Shep, for me, a boss, long-time friend, a great pool player and some great advice); Carl Yearwood (for me a boss, friend and great guy to everyone); and Ben Martin (a teacher, coach, and friend). This was what Oak Ridge, OSTI and many of the other organizations were all about then – family and friends!

"John mentioned the TTU football games, well, we did not miss many. Never the Thanksgiving game against Middle TN, you talk about cold. We got lost a time or two and went to some games that were not being played. Bill Vaden was on many, many of those trips with us.

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"John talked about dad's sense of humor, very true. John forgot to tell about the horse under the house that I took with me and my kids grew up believing. Also the story dad told about Cas Walker being our cousin – I believed that for years!

"John spoke of Manny Reid who as a great friend. That reminded me about Dad's heavy involvement and long service in the formation of the 1st Christian Church in Oak Ridge.

"Another thing that dad was involved in was a band made up of a lot of guys from OSTI - the 'Music Crafters.' They played for a number of years around East Tennessee. They were outstanding!

"As John stated, dad was, above all of the things he did and was involved in, a family man.

"Growing up a single child he did not want that to happen with his children. And, he has the kids, grandkids and great-grand kids to prove it! I'm the oldest at 62 with three children, all married and two granddaughters. John is the youngest with three kids. We have two sisters with one child each.

"Why not more grandkids? Well, I'm 13 years older than one sister, 15 years older than another and 18 years older than John. For a number of years when I was in the service, John and the girls would talk about their older brother. But, most of their friends didn't believe them since no one ever saw me. There are also four other Shannon kids that were born after me but died early.

"I could go on and on about dad and growing up in Oak Ridge but I think by now you understand what kind of man our dad, Bob Shannon, was. With so many interests, involvement in things, family, etc, he still wanted the best for OSTI and the folks that worked there. I know that dad and Bill were under extreme pressure many times during many projects but they were best of friends and always 'got 'er done.'

"In my opinion, and that is like a nose, every one has one, it would be impossible to talk about the past days of OSTI without talking about both dad and Bill.

I would agree. In my research into the history of the Office of Scientific and Technical Information, Bob Shannon and Bill Vaden have played prominent roles in the success of the organization. But Bill Vaden was also a close family friend.

John says, "Bill Vaden was my dad's best friend. Their relationship extended to us (the kids) which in turn has extended to my children as well. I was probably five years old before I realized that Bill Vaden was not my blood relative and uncle. We had always been brought up to call him Uncle Bill and if that was good enough for my mom and dad, it was good enough for me.

"Bill and Maxine have always been there for our family. Bill was there for my dad as a co-worker and partner in the truest sense of the word. Bill and Maxine allowed me to stay with them when my parents were gone from time to time. One time, I had the luxury of staying with them for 2 weeks when my parents had gone to France and Belgium on an International AEC meeting. I think that I truthfully got the better end of the deal on that one!

"Conversely, Bill and Maxine also had to give my sister the news on dad's death. My mom trusted them more than anyone in the world to do that. Bill was also one of the Pall Bearer's at the funeral. Letters came in from around the world regarding dad's passing and they were sent to Bill to be passed on to mom. He was well known during his career nationally and internationally as a

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very respected man and was entrusted by our family to help guide us through the most tragic time of our lives.

"Over the years, Bill and Maxine have served as mentors, advisors and most of all have been cherished as true family to us. I'm very blessed to have the honor of calling them my godparents and my children love them as much as I do.

"Having grown up in the "Golden Age" of Oak Ridge, you don't realize what you have there until you are gone. I had the very good fortune of being invited to the 60th Anniversary of OSTI a couple of weeks ago and was able to take my three children to the event. I was very honored and touched by the kind words that were said about both my dad and Bill Vaden. I know that both of them would be amazed by the accomplishments made by the organization as we head further into the 21st century. It's quite a legacy to live up to but I feel that they are holding the torch very high.

Lee adds, "Bill was single for many years, but I remember that many of the times that we (dad, Bill and I) went to Tennessee Tech games that we would stop and see Maxine. I thought it was the greatest thing in the world when they married. If ever there were two folks made for each other...

"When I was in the Army and stationed in Germany, Bill had to make a trip to Europe on business and made it a point to meet me for a day. It meant more to me than anything that had happened to me at that time in my life. So far away, for so long, and I had family to visit!

"Many years after dad's passing, our grandmother (dad's mom) died and again Bill was there with Maxine. Bill and dad go way back and as John said, were best of friends at work and play.

Well, I am sure you agree we have created a gem of a story here with the help of John and Lee Shannon. Also of interest is that at least two sets of long lost friends have connected, one with John and one with Lee as a direct result of these articles. That makes my day!

And to top it all off, Bill Vaden has read the first article and found it satisfactory, I hope he finds this one equally sound. Although he lost a good friend in Bob, he has continued on the path he and Bob began and has even documented the success in an extraordinary book - *The Oak Ridge Technical Information Center – A Trailblazer in Federal Documentation*.

It was a joy to address the multifaceted attributes of these two men from the perspective of John and Lee, Bob Shannon's sons. I thank them for their candor and cooperation.