

REFUGE RACCOON'S WORDS ON WILDLIFE

The shirt off his back



RON PRICE JR.

"Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge, this is Ron." Since 1998, this was a likely response that you would receive if you dialed the telephone number for the Okmulgee based national wildlife refuge. While Ronal D. Price Jr., or Ron as we knew him, wore the official title Administrative Officer, he also was a beloved coworker, friend, and confidant for the staff of the small office tucked down the end of South 250 Road. Ron began his service to his country in the United States Army as a photographer; however in 1990 he came onboard with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service. It was evident that within our small organization, Ron had found his professional home. Over the years Ron was tasked with keeping the budgets of several of the Oklahoma refuges on track- ordering equipment, running the payroll, and doing other duties that you would expect from someone with a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from Northeastern State University to do. However nothing was ordinary about Ron and this became clearer as the years passed and Ron volunteered for such additional duties as training other incoming employees, becoming a Wildland Firefighter, or helping with environmental education programs.

Ron was a focal point of Deep Fork, and people would often stop into the office to just talk with him. He was a purveyor of Okmulgee County History, and a connoisseur

of summer blackberries. He would often head down to the nearby blackberry bushes on his lunch break, returning with a handful of the glistening fruit and a huge smile on his face as he made his rounds through the office with a yellow bowl brimming with them. Sharing blackberries was only the start of Ron's kindness. I was a newly hired Visitor Services Specialist in the office when last winter came and found myself "left out in the cold" so to speak without a uniform winter coat. Ron, unbeknownst to me, had noticed that I was without a jacket, and one day I looked up from my desk to find Ron standing in front of me with his extra winter coat in his hands, which he allowed me to borrow for the duration of the winter. While in today's era it is difficult to find a person who will still give you the proverbial shirt off of their back, the refuge and the community, literally found

that in Ron.

For twenty seven years Ron donned the "brown and tan" as the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service uniform is affectionately called by the Service's staff, and proved that dedication to both the wildlife and the citizens of the United States is very much alive and well. Ron passed away on June 22, 2017 at the age of fifty six at his desk, taking care of the Oklahoma refuges and his many coworkers both near and far. While the refuge office will be void in the years to come of Ron's hearty laugh (accompanied by a knee slap and a wide grin), the hearts of all of Ron's colleagues and friends within the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service are full of his devotedness to wildlife, his friendship, and most of all his kindness. We will always miss Ron, and will carry forward his memory in all that we do in the name of conservation.