

A Tribute to Don I. Wortman

By Kristine Marcy

I had the good fortune of working for Don at the Office of Economic Opportunity Administration and the Price Commission during the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. Don's personality was infectious, sparkling; it colored everything he did. Work for him was a joy. Even after I left to go to OMB and beyond, Don continued to give me solicited and unsolicited advice. He was a wonderful mentor and good friend.

Don began his government service in the Army as part of the US Occupation of Japan. Afterward, using the GI Bill, he attended Macalester College where he earned his BA, and then went on to the University of Minnesota where he earned his Master of Public Administration. He started his long federal career at the Atomic Energy Commission, then OEO and the Price Commission. During the Ford Administration, he played a major role in resettling 60,000 Vietnamese refugees in the US. In 1977, while working at then HEW, he became the Chairman of the task force charged with implementing the reorganization of the Department. This led to the merger of the Medicare and Medicaid programs into the Health Care Financing Administration where he became its first Administrator. From 1977-1978, he served as Commissioner of the Social Security Administration. His last federal position was as Deputy Director for Administration at the Central Intelligence Agency. In total, Don served as a federal public servant for 27 years during which time, he gained a reputation as one of the federal government's foremost troubleshooters - an executive who could quickly take charge of a fledgling or troubled federal agency, overhaul it, restore employee morale and mobilize the staff. He was an exemplar of the federal career Senior Executive Service. Notably, he served in senior-level political appointee positions in both Republican and Democratic Administrations.

Don was elected as a Fellow of the Academy in 1979. In the early 1980s, he joined the Academy as Vice President and Director of Federal Programs. He stayed until 1995 when he retired to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Don was the epitome of a public servant: someone who deeply cares about the welfare of people and who strives to ensure that government works for the public good, in an effective, impartial and just manner.

Don was known for his integrity. He was honest and straightforward. He had a great sense of humor and made those around him happy. He was a bureaucrat but not bureaucratic.

In 2014, Don's NAPA friends and colleagues led a NAPA fundraising campaign to name the Executive Board Room for him. There, you see his picture with a huge smile on his face - a very typical Wortman expression.

In honoring Don, then NAPA CEO and President, Dan G. Blair, stated, "At a time when public servants are often caught up in partisan bickering and cross currents in Washington, it is critically important to remember that these hardworking leaders are the ones who make the government work. It is therefore a great honor to recognize one of these public servants, Don Wortman, who served so many, in so many places over his long career."