

Remembering Lee Black – A Caring Man

Deborah MacSwain, Pikes Peak Chapter Volunteer



Tuesday, December 19, 2006—Retired Executive Director of the American Red Cross Pikes Peak Chapter and USAF (retired) Colonel Lee Black passed away October 19, 2006. Having served 29 years in the Air Force through WWII, the Korean War and Vietnam, Colonel Black retired from military service in 1971. He was the founder and first commander of the U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School.

Almost immediately after his military career he took over the helm of the Pikes Peak Chapter until his retirement from the Red Cross in 1983. He is known to be one of the longest serving Executive Directors in the local Red Cross chapter's history.

On serving the Red Cross, Black was quoted by the Colorado Springs Sun as saying, "I fell in love with the ethic of the Red Cross, and that has never waned and never diminished". His interest in the Red Cross and desire to see the Pikes Peak Chapter serve the needs of the community never diminished.

Building on already strong relations with the City Parks and Recreation Department and other community recreation and swim programs, the Red Cross First Aid, Boating, and Water Safety courses grew at a rapid pace. The chapter partnered with the Special Olympics, schools, the military, businesses and others to ensure Red Cross health and safety courses were available.

Training people to be safe and help others was of utmost importance to Black. He took a special interest in making sure the residents of the Pikes Peak area were "water proof". According to his daughter Suzanne Traxler "my father enjoyed swimming and tried to swim every day until his 1st heart attack in 1983". His leadership in this area helped set the popularity and importance of Red Cross Learn to Swim programs in the area today. Most of the community's swimming instructors and aquatic managers have been Red Cross trained.

Providing emergency communications to the military, along with providing disaster relief, were (and still are) nationally mandated chapter responsibilities. Black led the chapter through several large and less known relief activities. The chapter helped in the re-settlement of Vietnamese refugees that were forced to

leave their country after the fall of Saigon. More than 500 Vietnamese families were helped locally.

Disaster preparedness and relief were as important then as now. In 1975, the chapter's disaster chairman noted the importance of having low cost "flood" insurance. That same year, the chapter provided mass care to more than 60 firefighters at the Indian Creek Estates fire 4 miles north of Florissant, and again at a fire 9 miles outside Woodland Park. In 1976 the chapter provided communications for survivors of the Big Thompson flood.

The Pikes Peak Chapter's archives are full of stories where the Red Cross, under Blacks leadership, helped locals impacted by tornados, floods, fires, and blizzards. He led the way for the chapter to help raise funds or send volunteers for national disasters when the need arose.

Lee Black was a man who cared. He believed in the Red Cross mission and continued to support the Pikes Peak Chapter after his retirement. Asked what she would like to say about her father, Traxler commented "my father really loved and cared for people. He was optimistic, upbeat and reached out for others. He was generous by nature and the Red Cross was a perfect place for him."