

# THE TRUTH WELL TOLD *Independent*

Wednesday January 22, 2020



## Navajo mourns loss of attorney who helped create NTUA

By Marley Shebala  
Diné Bureau  
navajo1@gallupindependent.com

FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation is mourning the loss of Walter Wolf Jr., an attorney of 61 years who helped create Navajo Tribal Utility Authority.

The Navajo Nation has lost a champion who dedicated his life to providing utility services to the Navajo people and advancing our nation forward through self-determination,” Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon said in a news release.

“We will continue to honor his memory on the Council floor.

“He faithfully served the Navajo people in the public power industry since 1959 and spent decades of his life working with NTUA to positively transform the lives of Navajo families,” Damon added.

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority General Manager Walter Haase said, “He was one of the few real champions for the Navajo people. His achievements were many. For more than 60 years he helped us

advance NTUA, in doing so, benefiting the Navajo people.

“Personally, Walter has helped more than I can put into words,” Haase said. “It has been my honor and privilege to work with him. He was a wonderful coach and guide for me as I navigated my new role at NTUA. He provided me outstanding assistance throughout my career here on the Navajo Nation. Most importantly, he was a great friend to me. He will truly be missed.”

Deenise Becenti, tribal utility spokesperson, said Wolf, who had recently worked as a legal consultant after he reached his retirement years, died Jan. 18.

“His family said his passing was peaceful and without suffering,” Becenti said.

### The task of creating the tribal utility

She said Wolf’s story began when he was hired as a young attorney to the Nation’s legal counsel and given the task of creating the tribal utility, when at the time, it was a small water operations branch with no electric customers.

Becenti recalled that energy distribution was an unexplored possibility for Navajo leaders, and it seemed completely out of reach until Wolf presented them a plan to create a tribal utility system.

“This was shortly before the Glen Canyon Dam was built, before massive electric transmission lines were placed within Navajo land, when utility development in the southwest was in growth mode,” she said. “He always believed that NTUA should do what it can to extend electricity to as many homes as possible, whether homes are near the main electric grid, or not.”

Becenti noted that in 1965,

the tribal utility took over its first distribution line from the Bureau of Indian Affairs with Wolf at the negotiation table.

She said he recently negotiated with Rocky Mountain Power for its service territory in southeastern Utah, where hundreds of families were waiting for more than 50 years to get electricity.

“I am overwhelmed as I am humbled,” Wolf said after the 2016 Rocky Mountain Power acquisition. “It brings personal satisfaction to see what we started has grown into what it is today. I am truly thankful to have witnessed such our progress. Every power line that we build is an achievement, and every family that we connect is a success story. I’m happy that I have accomplished something this significant in my lifetime. I’m very lucky.”

### Navajo People’s Award

Becenti said that during Wolf’s 60 years of service with the tribal utility, he’s worked with five general managers and since 2008, he was an advisor, colleague, and coach for Haase.

She said that in 2015, Wolf was a recipient of the American Public Power Association James D. Donovan Individual Achievement Award, which recognizes people who have made substantial contributions to the electric utility industry with a special commitment to public power.

Becenti said that in 2005, the tribal utility presented Wolf with the “Friend of NTUA and the Navajo People Award.”

Damon noted that the Council is sending a letter of condolence and a Navajo Nation flag to the family of Wolf.

“We honor the legacy that

he has left for generations of Navajo families,” the speaker said. “Please keep the Wolf family in your prayers.”

A memorial service will be hosted by the Wolf family at French Funeral Home at 7121 Wyoming Blvd. NE in Albuquerque at 3 p.m. Thursday.



Walter  
Wolf Jr.