



One more for the Hall of Fame

Senator Bill Stouffer posted Hall of Fame statistics in his service to agriculture

by Don Copenhaver

The Missouri Institute of Cooperative's Hall of Fame is wonderful recognition for exceptional leaders of cooperatives. Each year, MFA has been fortunate to have individuals inducted. Those leaders include:

- Lester Evans, former chairman of MFA Incorporated's board
- Bud Frew, former president and CEO of MFA Incorporated
- Fred Heinkel, former president
- William Hirth, former president
- Eric Thompson, former president
- Ray Young, former executive vice president and CEO of MFA Incorporated and president of MFA Oil

Add Bill Stouffer to the list. This year, the Missouri Senator from Napton, Mo. (between Boonville and Marshall), joined the other MFA luminaries in the MIC Hall of Fame.

Let me say up front, with the exception of political issues that directly affect agriculture, I try to use this space in a nonpartisan way. Specifically, I avoid endorsing or opposing particular candidates or parties. I need to provide a disclaimer that my comments are in support of Bill as an individual who served MFA faithfully as a corporate board member and as president of our board. He's in the public eye today as a state senator, but he's in MFA's record book as one of our most effective board members.

As a member of the corporate board of directors for MFA from 1979 to 1995, including two terms as board chair, Bill Stouffer epitomized excellence. He was first elected to MFA Incorporated's

board during a crucial period in the cooperative's history.

Agriculture was consolidating rapidly. Bill forged stability and success for the cooperative during an agricultural crisis and leadership change. 1979 was the year long-time MFA President Fred Heinkel was defeated in his bid for re-election. In the midst of turmoil, Stouffer molded the board into a strategic entity.

Bill Stouffer embraced economic reality. He understood the fiduciary responsibilities of board members. He is a strategic thinker capable of complex analysis. He is not afraid to make difficult decisions. Bill was a willing champion for necessary change.

As a member of the corporate board, Bill was flawless in preparation. His leadership skills were impressive. He was willing to challenge management, but he did not micromanage. More importantly, he was able to see the big picture. Bill has a keen ability to press for appropriate action through consensus, not confrontation, by knowing when to end discussion and reach decisions for the good of the cooperative.

Letters in support of his nomination were submitted by David Jobe, retired MFA senior vice president of corporate operations, Bud Frew, retired president and CEO of MFA, and me. One paragraph in Bud's description really rang true and made me smile. "Bill became an effective board leader despite the circumstances. He knew when to speak and when to be silent. He could lead, and he could march. Perhaps most importantly, he knew which was

appropriate. To be sure, Bill Stouffer understood herding cats."

Bill epitomized a board member. He completely understood the role of a corporate board director and the role of management and he respected the boundaries. He was instrumental in stabilizing MFA's corporate board during a time of turmoil. More importantly, he molded the board into a strategic entity capable of assisting and directing management.

His leadership skills were impressive. His ability to summarize discussion and press for appropriate action reflected an organized intellect that brought consensus rather than confrontation. Almost single-handedly, Bill Stouffer developed a new management style for MFA's corporate board and set standards later boards would follow.

The same attributes that made him an exceptional board director then make him an outstanding state senator today. He understands agriculture. His grasp of the issues allows him to get others to understand the consequences. He is prepared and accessible, searching for information and dialogue. He does the right things for the right reasons.

Bill Stouffer has been instrumental in the success of MFA Incorporated and now serves our state with the same level of integrity and purpose. He sets a standard for leadership that all should aspire to match, but few will achieve. He is worthy of inclusion in the Hall of Fame. He's definitely worthy of our respect and admiration. **IF**

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