

In Memoriam – Ted Thomas



Ted Thomas, Chief of the Department of Water Resources Media and Public Information Branch for more than 20 years and a well-known reporter and editor for 25 years before beginning his State service, passed away last weekend at his home in Sacramento.

"Ted ranks among the best California State information officers I knew in almost 40 years of service," said Pete Weisser, retired DWR employee and former Chief of DWR's Public Affairs Office. "A skilled writer and a meticulous editor, Ted was an expert on California history, politics, and water policy topics."

For decades, Ted rubbed elbows with the famous and infamous in California government, journalism, and politics. One of his longest acquaintances was Dan Walters, who continues writing about California affairs for the CalMatters non-profit website after 33 years as a Sacramento Bee columnist.

"I met Ted in 1961 when I was a young reporter at the Humboldt Times and he was attending Humboldt State and working a little at the paper," Walters recalled this week. "We later became roommates, and he was the best man in my wedding."

"Ted was a very good reporter and was particularly interested in foreign affairs. He knew a lot of people all over the world from his reporting travels."

Ted grew up on a large cattle and sheep ranch near the little Northern California town of Miranda, which is between Eureka and Garberville. He was drafted into the United States Army in 1963, and having had some newspaper experience at the Humboldt Times, his natural fit was as an information specialist. Ted attended the Army Information School at Fort Benjamin Harrison near Indianapolis, IN.

After leaving the service, he worked for the Humboldt Times as political editor and columnist from 1967 to 1974, then left Northern California for the tropical climes of Costa Rica, where he became a freelance writer throughout Central America and later reported for the San Jose News until 1975, when he joined The Sacramento Union.

Ted's professionalism and dedication to public information was obvious in his many years of daily news and political reporting in Northern California, across the nation, and

internationally. He covered Governor Ronald Reagan and the State Legislature for the Union.

As the Union's Assistant City Editor and a reporter for eight years, Ted covered all levels of government. In 1983, he moved to Washington D.C. to become Deputy Foreign Editor of the Washington Times, directing the paper's worldwide network of foreign correspondents, as well as reporting on special projects, a series on the Reagan Administration among them. Ted returned to Sacramento to work for the Union from 1984 to 1988 as Deputy Editorial Page Editor, writing editorials and establishing the paper's editorial policy.

His State career began as Assistant Director for Public Affairs of the Department of Fish and Game (now Fish and Wildlife) from 1988 to 1992. Ted wrote the Department's Public Relations Plan, which greatly expanded television and newspaper coverage.

Ted's long career at DWR began in 1997 and was dedicated to conveying factual, accurate information on water issues to the news media and the public. Former DWR Director David Kennedy, who was the longest-serving DWR Director, was among many experts impressed with Ted's command of water issues and their ever-present controversies.

Ted readily shared information with the media and public on the long history and complex operations of California's State Water Project. During massive flooding in 1997 and 1998, he tirelessly worked long shifts to inform the news media on developments.

Sonny Fong, retired Chief of DWR's Emergency and Security Operations Office, said, "Ted was a true friend – and once a friend, always a friend." Fong worked with Ted during those floods and recalled how central Ted was in keeping the media and public informed about the crisis.

Other DWR personnel said Ted devoted the same skills and patience in briefing reporters at small media outlets that he displayed in interviews to television network anchors. Whether a drought, flood, or SWP operations, he always ranked media response as one of his top priorities while working for the State.

Ted was blessed with a rich sense of humor, which he wryly shared with co-workers. He was a keen student of California history and geography and a devoted reader of World War II histories, politics, international affairs, Latin American history, archaeology, and American Indian history.

For those privileged to work for him, Ted was an excellent mentor who worked closely with employees he supervised to help them enhance their job skills. His employees were always happy to come to work each day. He will be greatly missed.