



David L. Spangler

1946 – 2020

Toledo Blade October 22, 2020

(News story) OAK HARBOR, Ohio - David L. Spangler, a charter boat captain who became one of the Great Lakes region's more beloved water-quality advocates, died Wednesday at Heroes Harbor Hospice, part of the Cleveland Veterans Administration Medical Center.

The Oak Harbor resident succumbed to leukemia on the morning of his 74th birthday, according to his wife, Kathy "Kady" Lerch.

Though known for a calm and gentle demeanor, Mr. Spangler was as fiercely devoted to improving Lake Erie as anyone, according to those who knew him.

His personality was one which gave him credibility with people from both ends of the political spectrum.

He took his role as a Great Lakes ambassador seriously by donating countless hours in his boat to help educate people up close about Lake Erie. He also spent hundreds of hours attending scientific seminars and public meetings across northwest Ohio, in Columbus, in Washington, and as far east in Canada as Quebec City, friends said.

Mr. Spangler was part a group of fishing-charter captains who came up with the idea eight years ago to pull water samples at a predetermined time each week, giving the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and others a much broader geographical look at changing water-quality conditions throughout the summer.

Gov. Mike DeWine called Mr. Spangler "a true guardian of Lake Erie and a wonderful person."

Former Gov. Bob Taft said he "always enjoyed his company on FishOhio Day."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D., Ohio) said he always appreciated talking to Mr. Spangler "whether in Washington or his boat in the middle of Lake Erie."

"Anyone who knew Dave knew his passion for Lake Erie, a steadfast advocate for the lake, dedicated to bringing everyone together to protect our Great Lake," Mr. Brown said. "Ohio lost a true champion for the environment this week."

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R., Ohio) called Mr. Spangler "a true champion of our Great Lakes."

"He will be very sorely missed by many in the Great Lakes community and will be remembered for his lifelong dedication to protecting and improving our lakes," Mr. Portman said.

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D., Toledo) said Mr. Spangler was "in a class all his own" and "a gentleman in the first order" who combined practical, real-life experience as a boat captain with a great understanding of science he picked up from some of the area's top researchers.

"Communities thrive with citizens like him. He became an expert but never wore on it his sleeve. Those individuals are exceptional," Ms. Kaptur said. "We're a better community because of him."

Said Lucas County Commission President Tina Skeldon Wozniak: "His passion and care for this most precious resource made him one of the most sought-after advocates to give insight on how serious the lake issues are. Dave was loved by many, a guy with a big smile, and a fishing story to add to the joy of being around him."

Born Oct. 21, 1946 in Defiance, Mr. Spangler became a first lieutenant in the Army and served for three years, including a tour in Vietnam. He was a Purple Heart and Bronze Star recipient.

Mr. Spangler retired from Johns-Manville after 37 years, where he worked as an operations manager in the Waterville plant.

He was licensed by the Coast Guard and operated a fishing charter boat in Lake Erie's western basin for 27 years.

Mr. Spangler served as Lake Erie Charter Boat Association vice president and became close friends with longtime president Paul Pacholski about 10 years ago. In 2014, he was the group's Captain of the Year.

He and Mr. Pacholski were inseparable partners at countless events.

"Dave and I fed off each other. I mean, we really did," Mr. Pacholski said. "Without question, he made me a better person and a better advocate.

"Everything we talked about was for the betterment of Lake Erie. I'm lost without him. I'm a high-energy guy with something glib or sarcastic to say. He held his cards a lot closer than I did."

Craig Butler, who served as Ohio EPA director under former Gov. John Kasich, said the Spangler-Pacholski tandem helped explain Lake Erie issues to him more clearly from a boat captain's perspective.

"Dave and Paul were the ones I could go to to hear it straight," Mr. Butler said. "I will always respect him for that and his never-ending passion. He also was the one that would take me and my family fishing outside of work and spend many hours ensuring they have fun. He is a treasure

lost."

Mr. Spangler also served as Lake Erie Waterkeeper president for several years, and served on the Lake Erie Foundation board of directors.

"The greatest legacy of Dave's Lake Erie work would be to reduce the sources of harmful algae, especially manue," Sandy Bihn, Lake Erie Waterkeeper founder, said.

Sean Logan, who served as Ohio Department of Natural Resources director under former Gov. Ted Strickland, agreed.

"He was a wonderful human being and a consummate advocate for all things Lake Erie," Mr. Logan said. "A very effective ambassador for sport fishing for Lake Erie and the entire Great Lakes.

"It's a big voice that's lost. The things he fought for are things that everyone in the entire Great Lakes benefits from. We should redouble our efforts in his honor."

Jeff Reutter, retired director of Ohio Sea Grant and Ohio State University Stone Laboratory, said Mr. Spangler was "everyone's 'go-to' person when seeking a speaker to present some real-world impacts of harmful algal blooms on coastal businesses and charter captains and their clientele.

"All Lake Erie users and everyone who gets their drinking water from Lake Erie owe David Spangler a huge debt of gratitude. We have lost a true champion and a great person," Mr. Reutter said.

Mr. Spangler served on Lake Erie Center for Fresh Water's advisory board and was recently appointed to the Tourism Ohio and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission advisory boards.

Tom Bridgeman, the University of Toledo Lake Erie Center's director, said he "had the greatest respect and affection for Dave," and Bowling Green State University algae researcher Tim Davis called him "a tireless advocate for Lake Erie."

Former Toledo City Councilman Frank Szollosi, now head of the National Wildlife Federation's Montana affiliate after years as NWF's Great Lakes policy director, said Mr. Spangler's "friends in the advocacy community will miss him dearly."

Kristy Meyer of Freshwater Future said she is "heartbroken" by Mr. Spanger's death and "his passing has been felt far and wide."

"Dave is a beautiful soul. He was kind, caring, loving, gentle, passionate and patient," she said. "He always greeted you with a smile and hug and always parted you with a hug. He loved being out on the lake fishing and educating decision-makers, the media and public on the importance of significantly reducing harmful algal blooms. He was everyone's 'grandfather.'"

Survivors include his wife, Kath "Kady" Lerch, whom he married in 2007; sons, Jared Lerch and

Nathan Lerch; daughters, Courtney Cochran and Melissa Lerch; sister, Mary Engle, and three grandchildren. He was preceded in death by a brother.

A celebration of Mr. Spangler's life will be held in the spring of 2021. Dunn Funeral Home in Bowling Green is handling arrangements.

Tributes may be made to www.lakeeriewaterkeeper.org or www.fisherhouse.org.

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Published in The Blade on O