

IAPMO, Industry Owe a Great Deal to George Bliss

IStory by GP Russ Chaney

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the passing of retired UA Director of Training George H. Bliss, III, [on April 16](#). George was my friend, my mentor, in many ways a father figure, and truly an inspirational influence on my life and career.

George was initiated into Plumbers Local 5 in Washington, D.C., on Dec. 14, 1955, and retired April 1, 2005. He dedicated his entire professional career to education and training, beginning as an instructor with Local 5. He became assistant director of Training for the UA in 1973, and in 1997 he was named Director. He also served as chairman of the Building and Construction Trades Department (now North America's Building Trades Unions-NABTU) Apprenticeship and Training Committee. In 2005, he was appointed Chairman of the World Plumbing Council and served for three years.

I met George in the early '90s while I was working with National PHCC and serving as secretariat of the National Standard Plumbing Code Committee. George was serving as the UA representative on the same committee. At that time there were several plumbing codes, including the ANSI A40, NSPC, BOCA, SBCCI, and the UPC; George served on all of these committees. What struck me about George was that he was well respected and had a mentoring type of approach. He didn't speak up often nor say much when he did, but when he spoke the room went silent and people listened. George promoted a simple philosophy that public health and safety should be protected by maintenance of plumbing systems that are critically important to ensuring access to clean water and safe sanitation. Education and training of skilled craftsman is essential to ensuring that plumbing systems meet their intended purpose. This approach was underpinned by ensuring that skilled tradesmen are properly educated.

In July 1995, I was still working as executive director of the NJ PHCC and director of Technical Services at the National PHCC; by this time I had known George for four years. After one of our meetings, he asked me to meet him for a drink. We talked about IAPMO and the troubles the association was having with ICBO. In 1994 IAPMO had terminated a contract with ICBO that created a circumstance where IAPMO had to replace support services that ICBO had been providing. That, combined with political turmoil, was creating internal long-term instability. George believed strongly the association would not survive without dramatic changes. He wanted to bring in someone who would get IAPMO back on track and thought I would be a good fit. This is the conversation that brought me to IAPMO. Though I was not a UA member, George vouched for me and helped me secure an interview at the 1995 IAPMO Board of Directors meeting. I began working for IAPMO on Oct. 23, 1995.

Between my hiring and starting my employment, I met with George at IAPMO's annual conference in Sacramento. I remember vividly the advice he gave me, words that provided me strength and resolve to tackle the task at hand. He told me I was going to have many challenges because IAPMO was in tough shape and that I was going to need to be able to steer the organization in the right direction. He assured me that he would always be there to help me with anything I needed to get the work done. He went on to explain that 99 percent of the decisions I

would be making on behalf of IAPMO would have a positive impact on the UA and in those cases I should make the best choice for IAPMO without hesitation. Then he truly surprised me.

George said there will be a time where I have to make a tough call, something that won't be popular with the UA. "I expect you'll do what's right for IAPMO," he told me. "Don't let any of that affect you. Be guided by your own convictions and judgments. I will always support you."

He never went back on that promise.

In subsequent years we became close friends, traveling together often both in our work capacity and with our families. His mentorship and snippets of wisdom will stay with me for the rest of my life. It's hard not to look at the life of someone like George and not think of him as the kind of special person you can put on a pedestal. I don't recall anybody ever saying a negative word about him. I was very fortunate to have crossed paths with George and IAPMO owes so much of our success to his influence on our great organization.

Jutta and I extend sincere condolences to Diane, their children, grandchildren, extended family, and the thousands of people whose lives were without any doubt bettered by having met George. Our industry has lost a great contributor, a devoted tradesman, and mentor to many of us who will miss him always!