

Linn County commissioners saddened by death of former ODVA Director Jim Willis

ALBANY — Linn County Commissioners Roger Nyquist, Sherrie Sprenger and Will Tucker are saddened by the death of Jim Willis, retired Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs Director, who was instrumental in locating the Edward C. Allworth Veterans Home in Lebanon.

An Albany resident, the U.S. Air Force veteran died Monday.

“Jim did a lot for veterans in Linn County and throughout Oregon,” Nyquist said. “He was 100% committed to his mission. My thoughts are with his family today.”

Sprenger recalled working with Willis when she served in the state legislature.

“In 2008, when I was a brand new legislator, I met Jim Willis, who at that time was Director of Veterans Affairs,” Sprenger said. “When veterans reached out to me for help in accessing their benefits, I always went directly to Jim and he was the best friend a veteran could have.”

Sprenger said that months after that first meeting, they realized Willis had been an instructor at the Police Academy in 1988, when Sprenger was a new deputy.

“Jim and I stayed in touch after he left the state job,” Sprenger said. “Jim loved Linn County. He wanted what was right, had incredible integrity, but above all, he loved veterans and would do anything for them.”

Tucker praised Willis’ commitment to all veterans.

“Jim Willis has been a long friend of Linn County. In his role as the Director of the Oregon Department of Veteran Affairs, he led the review of siting the Veterans Home that ultimately came to Lebanon. The Edward C. Allworth Veterans’ Home is a world-class facility and he was instrumental in making it so.”

Tucker added that Willis’ contribution to the veterans of the state was more than the veterans home

“He led the department that delivered services to thousands of Oregon’s veterans,” Tucker said. “He proudly called Linn County home.”

Willis was a staunch supporter for all veterans and loved the Albany Veterans Day Parade, which he started attending as a young child with his father.

He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1961 soon after graduating from Albany Union High School. He spent nearly seven years in the service, including one year in Vietnam.

He had a long career in law enforcement, first with the



Retired ODVA Director Jim Willis

Photo courtesy ODVA

Douglas County Sheriff’s Office and then with the Oregon State Police.

He served as Director of Veterans Affairs for 10 years.

Willis was a long-time member of the American Legion Post 10 and the VFW Post 584. He served in numerous local and national leadership roles.

Randy Martinak nominated Willis for Linn County Veteran of the Year and called him, “a veteran’s veteran” adding that Willis was “always there for his community and fellow veterans.”

ODVA Director Kelly Fitzpatrick said the “Oregon veteran community has lost one of its greatest friends and fiercest advocates.”

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