



APACHE NEWS



Raymond Plank Retrospective

Part Three: Giving Back

05/15/2019

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“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.”

Albert Pike, Ex Corde Locutiones

(A favorite quote of Raymond Plank)

This is the final chapter of our three-part Raymond Plank retrospective. Read parts [one](#) and [two](#).

A Small Difference

Apache Founder Raymond Plank had a well-earned reputation as a savvy businessman who could “see around corners.” As a leader, he was candid, blunt and demanding. He was a child of the Great Depression, and he developed an extreme frugality that stayed with him his entire life. However, Raymond Plank was a contrarian. Despite his frugal and somewhat cantankerous nature, he rejected the stereotype of the tightfisted, coldhearted businessman. In fact, beneath his tough exterior was a generous man with a heart of gold.

Former Apache board member and Plank’s lifelong friend, Brooks Fields, once said, “Raymond Plank is the biggest ‘give it back’ man among my friends.” Another Apache colleague and friend, David Higgins,

concluded, “He rarely took a breath without reminding himself that to whom much is given, from whom much is required. He did it with less and built it into more than any of his peers.”

Plank himself credited his father with teaching him the importance of charity. In his memoirs, Plank wrote:

“At perhaps the age of ten, when I was on a walk with my dad, he dropped my hand, put his arm around my shoulder and noted, ‘Son, over my life I’ve found it useful to try to make a very small difference on behalf of others.’”

The message resonated with Plank. Throughout his long life, Plank strove to abide by the lessons of generosity his father instilled. Eighty years after receiving that fatherly advice, Plank would title his memoirs “A Small Difference.”



Plank writes at his desk in Houston.

Civil Rights

Plank’s active civic involvement started in the ‘50s when he became the youngest person to join the leadership of the Minneapolis branch of the Boys and Girls Clubs. Plank felt that the club did good work but did not adequately address the needs of the poor. When he became head of the organization, he worked with local clergy and community leaders to ensure that the next clubhouse built was in Minneapolis’ underserved north side. Plank faced stiff opposition from the city council but triumphed in the end, and the clubhouse was built.

Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftlin asked Plank to head the city’s Council on Human Relations. Plank accepted the position, which led to his involvement in the civil rights movement. Plank focused on employment equity and met Reverend Leon Sullivan, a legendary civil rights leader. Sullivan headed a training center for the unemployed in Philadelphia. Plank invited him to Minnesota to discuss if the same program could be successful in Minneapolis.

The times were turbulent. Racial relations were strained, discrimination was rampant, and the civil rights movement was often met with violent resistance. Plank himself was the target of numerous death threats. However, Raymond Plank, a WWII veteran pilot who flew 40 combat missions and watched an atom bomb devastate a city, proved impossible to intimidate, and his efforts to improve employment opportunities continued unabated.

Ucross Foundation

As Apache grew larger and more profitable, Plank spent increasing amounts of time and money giving back to the communities where the company operated. One of these endeavors was Ucross.

In 1967, Apache began to drill for oil near the small town of Recluse, Wyoming. It quickly proved to be the company's most significant find at the time, producing at rates of 300 to 1,000 barrels per day. The flows from Recluse came at a critical period before prices advanced sharply in the '70s.

As Plank regularly drove from Apache headquarters in Minneapolis to the holdings in Wyoming, he would pass by a property at the intersection of Highways 14 and 16 near the tiny hamlet of Ucross, Wyoming (population 27). The property contained the remains of a large ranch house, barn and other structures from a 19th-century cattle ranch. Where others saw dilapidated buildings, Plank saw great potential. He saw an opportunity to give something back to the land and the people who helped contribute to Apache's success.

Plank felt a deep connection to this land and its history. He believed companies that benefitted from the land, like Apache, should help preserve and enhance it through responsible stewardship. He bought the 20,000-acre ranch and began efforts to preserve the land, restore its structures and make it as relevant to people in the future as it had once been in the late 1800s.

It was at that abandoned ranch that Plank founded the Ucross Foundation in 1981. At the time, it was, "the largest and most completely altruistic contribution to the state's future that any outside company has yet made," according to Stanley K. Hathaway, the former Wyoming governor and Apache board member.



The Ucross Foundation conference center.

The Ucross Foundation is a nonprofit organization that provides workspace and living accommodations to artists, writers and composers. Through residencies, artists can create books, plays, art exhibitions, musical performances and more. “Raymond loved creating opportunities for discussion where groups of people with different ideas and thoughts could come together,” said Sharon Dynak, president of Ucross Foundation.

Thousands of artists have lived and worked at the ranch. Ucross residents have earned 10 Pulitzer Prizes, nine MacArthur Genius Fellowships, six National Book Awards, six Tony Awards, and two Academy Awards. Residents include Annie Proulx, author of the best-selling novel “The Shipping News” and Elizabeth Gilbert, who wrote part of her bestselling novel “Eat, Pray, Love” at Ucross in 2004. Composer Adam Guettel wrote the score to the musical “The Light in the Piazza” while in residence. Dynak recalls Guettel inviting a small group to his cabin by the creek to listen to his newly created songs, which ultimately became the multiple Tony award-winning musical.

Each year, Ucross selects up to 100 individuals to live and create at the ranch for two to six weeks. “We give them the gift of uninterrupted time and space,” Dynak said. “We provide living quarters, meals and space to create, but their time is their own. In the evenings, we have group dinners where our residents share lively conversations with other artists they would never have had the opportunity to meet.”



Plank in front of the non-denominational chapel at Ucross in 2012.

The Ucross Foundation doesn't just support the arts; it's also a model for ecologically friendly land stewardship. In 1999, the Foundation placed a conservation easement on more than 12,000 acres of the ranch. As part of this initiative, the Foundation has broadened its programs to include the natural sciences and land issues of the American West in the 21st century. Today, the ranch house is listed on the National Historic Register and is committed to preserving the historic and cultural community of the West.

A long-term lease with Apache Foundation guarantees the goals of holistic ranch management, emulating natural processes and encouraging biological diversity and environmental stability. In addition to artists in residence, the ranch is also home to bald eagles, great blue herons, bobolinks, owls, the greater sage grouse and the Swainson's hawk. Ucross Ranch was designated an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society in 2015.

As one later trustee put it, "Ucross believes that being a good steward of the land closely resembles being a good artist — both require dedication, imagination and the best possible resources at hand."

The residents are very appreciative of their time at the ranch. Connecting with the land, the beauty of the wide-open spaces and the gift of uninterrupted time is inspiring. "Residents have told us that the experience is magical and transformative for them. Their newly forged relationships with other artists have sometimes spawned collaboration on future works," Dynak said. "Recently a writer came to my office and said, 'This place is heaven! No. It's better than heaven — because it's right here.'"

Thanks to Raymond Plank, and the support of many contributors, the Ucross Foundation is now a thriving, vibrant member of the community. It is a natural workshop that will inspire artists to create their best work for years to come.



Raymond Plank with son Mike Plank at the construction site of the Raymond Plank Library and Center for Land Stewardship, 2012.

Apache Tree Grant Program

The Ucross Foundation's responsible land stewardship isn't the only environmental initiative Plank started. In 2005, he founded the Apache Tree Grant program which focuses on improving wildlife habitats, restoring storm damage and enhancing cities and neighborhoods by donating and planting trees.

"Raymond Plank was a tree nut," said Obie O'Brien, former Apache vice president of governmental affairs & corporate outreach. "It was something that had been part of his upbringing. I think it was in 2004 or 2005 that he and I were talking, and he looked at me and said, 'I've got a new job for you. I want to plant a million trees through the Apache Foundation.'"

Plank's goal of one million trees was met and far surpassed. As of this writing, the Apache Tree Grant Foundation has helped plant over 4.6 million trees across 17 states. The program has donated trees to a wide variety of nonprofit and governmental organizations, including cities, counties, schools, parks, universities, youth associations, wildlife refuges and community groups. Apache employees often donate their time to help plant.



Former Houston Mayor Annise Parker and Former Apache President (and son of Raymond Plank) Roger Plank plant a tree in Houston's Memorial Park for Arbor Day 2012.

One major focus of the Tree Grant Program is on restoring areas devastated by natural disasters. On September 4, 2011, the most destructive wildfire in Texas history swept through Bastrop State Park, burning thousands of acres of trees. In the aftermath, Apache donated more than 600,000 pine tree seedlings to help reforest the area. The program also gave almost 70,000 trees to the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico, which had likewise seen severe losses to wildfire.

Apache donated 186,000 trees between 2008 and 2018 to the NOLA Tree project in New Orleans to replace those lost in Hurricane Katrina. When Hurricane Harvey ravaged trees in Apache's own hometown of Houston, the Apache Tree Grant program helped replant.



Pictured is a peach orchard that has been replanted as part of the restoration of the Gettysburg Battlefield in Pennsylvania. The Apache Tree Program donated some 3,000 trees toward the restoration effort.

Fund for Teachers

Raymond Plank cherished education. He was a dedicated lifelong learner and estimated that he had read more than 10,000 books in his lifetime. Because of his respect for the teachers who influenced him, Plank wanted to give something back. This began as an idea to provide travel sabbaticals to a handful of teachers from his high school in Minnesota.

In 2001, Plank expanded this program into the Fund for Teachers, a nationwide foundation that awards fellowship grants to pre-K to 12th-grade teachers for self-designed summer studies in the United States and abroad. Since its inception, Fund for Teachers has awarded close to \$30 million in fellowships to help more than 8,000 educators.



Andrew Lindsey from Hastings High School in Houston received a 2012 Fund for Teachers fellowship to tour homes and laboratories of famous scientists in England, France and Germany to introduce students to the people behind the discoveries.

Plank believed that travel expanded our understanding and perspective on the world. He thought it was important for everyone to travel to other countries and experience many cultures to gain an appreciation of how others live. Fund for Teachers has awarded fellowships to teachers to work and study in 163 countries on all seven continents.

“Raymond believed it was important for Apache and other corporations to behave as good corporate citizens and help build a nation of educated citizenry,” said Karen Webb, executive director of Fund for Teachers. “We support teachers as they develop and grow their own experiences, better equipping them to move through the world as forces for equity, achievement and change for the better. Teachers lead and support students as they hone these same skills. Raymond truly believed teachers were the giants among us, and good teachers could spark lifelong learning in their students. He understood the ripple effect teachers have on their students and society.”

“Like Raymond, Fund for Teachers believes in the potential of students and the future they must build. On average, a teacher’s career spans 20 years and impacts around 3,000 students. These grants not only provide memorable learning experiences for educators but also impact all of their students.”

“Raymond’s brilliance was conceiving ideas and finding the people who could make his dreams a reality. Just as he seeded these ideas, he hoped the teachers would seed great ideas in their students. What started as his ripple effect became a tsunami,” said Webb.



Left: 2012 Fund for Teachers Fellow Kiana Guerrero from Banana Kelly High School in New York studied sustainability models to expand students' understanding of green technology.

Right: Latiffe Amado from Environmental Science and Technology School in Los Angeles received a 2013 Fund for Teachers fellowship to join environmental conservation efforts in Nepal.

Springboard

Drilling in Egypt was one of Raymond Plank's signature contrarian moves — one that paid off in a big way. Apache is now the largest oil producer in Egypt, and the hydrocarbons found in the country have created enormous, long-lasting value for Apache stakeholders. Plank knew he had to give something back.

As he spent more time in Egypt, Plank saw that educational opportunities for girls in rural areas of the country were non-existent. He became a driving force behind Springboard, a philanthropic organization formed to improve educational opportunities for disadvantaged children in Egypt. Founded by Plank in 2004, Springboard provides educational prospects for girls who would otherwise have none.



Plank celebrates the construction of 35 new girls' schools in Egypt with Minister Moushira Khattab Secretary General, National Council for Childhood & Motherhood Egypt, October 2001.

Springboard was part of Plank's broader commitment to education as an essential first step up the social and economic ladder. The organization encourages innovative partnership and works with government and nongovernmental organizations, individuals and corporations to provide resources to construct and operate schools. Plank led the One Room Schools for Egypt's Girls project in support of the Girls' Education Initiative of Egypt's National Council for Childhood and Motherhood.

Springboard was a passion project for Plank, and he was highly motivated to see it come to fruition. Early on in a Springboard planning session Plank said, "We need to build hundreds of schools — and we need to hurry up and do it before I die!"

Through Springboard, Plank supported the construction of more than 200 girls' schools in Egypt. Over 10,000 girls learned how to read and write in Springboard schools. Thousands of students have graduated, with many going on to secondary schools to pursue advanced degrees. Currently, there are approximately 7,000 students enrolled.



**Left: Plank at a Springboard girls' school.
Right: Springboard graduation.**

Plank was pleased with Springboard's work in Egypt. "Perhaps some of the ten to fifteen thousand girls the schools in Egypt have served will remember Americans as a positive in their lives and Americans as friends. Egypt was a starting base for our work in girls' schools and the advancement of women, while most of the Springboard little girls were the first in their families to read and write," he wrote.

Apache and its employees continue to support the schools in many ways, including maintenance, drilling water wells and planting gardens. Apache employees in Egypt have also distributed 7,000 pairs of shoes to the girls, delivered computers and laptops to schools and conduct donation campaigns every year.



Students at a Springboard school in Egypt, 2018.

A Legacy of Giving

Plank never stopped learning, growing or giving. He always tried to make a small difference, but, for thousands of people, that difference was life-changing. Raymond Plank may be gone, but no one can doubt that his determination, passion and generosity left the world a better place.

John Christmann, Apache's CEO and president, may have said it best, "I believe this country is a better place because of Raymond. This company is great because of Raymond. I'm a better person because of Raymond. He left this world a little better than he found it. He left a legacy that we will greatly miss."

Today, Apache strives to continue Plank's legacy of philanthropy. "Give where we live and work" is a crucial part of the company's culture and identity. This spirit of giving goes beyond simple corporate policy. It's an ideal that's built into the very bones of the company. Every year, thousands of Apache employees donate their time, money and energy toward making a small difference on behalf of others.

Raymond Plank would be proud.



Apache CEO and President John Christmann with Raymond Plank at Plank's home in Ucross, Wyoming, 2016.

Comments

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[Rodriguez, Rene](#) 5/20/2019 10:34 AM

Excellent write-up. Thank you for sharing it. May his legacy last for ever.



[Ng, Gail](#) 5/17/2019 8:33 AM

Thank you for this retrospective series on Raymond Plank. What an inspiration!



[Kilgore, Claire](#) 5/16/2019 2:32 PM

He was such a visionary. Wow! He gave with great joy as we all should. Great reading.