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THE BEST CAVERS' MAGAZINE
IN TEXAS

2013 TSA OFFICERS

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The Texas Speleological Association is a nonprofit, internal organization of the National Speleological Society and represents the greater caving community in Texas.

The TSA is comprised of both independent members and local grottos, and supports cave exploration and studies in and around the state of Texas.

The organization holds business meetings three times per year, organizes an annual spring convention for Texas cavers, and sponsors caving projects and events throughout the state.

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GOD'S SPEED BOB COWELL

KURT MENKING

Bob Cowell, a long time caver in San Antonio, passed away October 5, 2013 after a difficult battle with cancer.

I've had the great pleasure to call Bob a friend for over 30 years. Bob was a great dad, husband, granddad, a caver, and a friend. But what most people who knew Bob would say was that he was a great storyteller. He also spent a great deal of his time helping others. I especially liked one of the recent comments on *texascaver*, that Bob was the most ethical person they had ever known.

When Bob first got involved in the caving scene in San Antonio it was a very welcome change for me. Bob's military background brought a more organized approach to many of our trips. For one thing Bob had little if any patience for cavers who were late for caving trips. It didn't take long for the rest of us to know if you were going to be more than 15 minutes late, and Bob was on the trip, the group will be gone when you get there. Prior to Bob's joining the grotto, we would often wait around for an hour or more, go to a pay phone to call missing cavers, and or drive to their house and get them out of bed.

Bob was occasionally late for caving trips, but we always knew it was because he was at a wreck scene somewhere. I've never known anyone who came across more serious wrecks

than Bob. And he would always stop to make sure everyone was OK. He would put out road flares (which he always carried in his vehicles), and make sure the proper authorities were called. He'd help the injured, direct traffic away from the scene, and generally take charge until police and EMS arrived.

Bob was also big on cave safety and cave rescue. Very early on, he helped organize cave rescue procedures, call down lists, training, etc. I went with Bob on numerous cave rescue calls. His experience, leadership, and out of the box thinking proved extremely valuable in most if not all of those events. His ability to evaluate a situation, jump in and help out was wonderful to watch. And he was never one to be intimidated by authority figures. If the official in charge was doing something dangerous, or wrong Bob would be in his face letting him know it. I witnessed him take on CEO's, Generals, Park Managers, County Fire Marshals and others when he thought it was necessary. In nearly every case they quickly recognized his value to the situation, implemented his ideas, and put him to work monitoring some aspect of the event.

Bob was also a major motivator and organizer for volunteer projects like Bracken Bat Cave, the



Photo by Mike Harris

Bamberger cookouts, and others. But mostly Bob loved caving trips. I think he liked the caving part, but he loved the campfire social part the best.

Prior to major events like TCR, Bob was organizing, planning, gathering supplies for many weeks. He'd be there to supervise the loading of the grotto gear, unloading and setting up the kitchen area, and cooking and serving grotto meals. Bob, Carl Ponebshek, and I caught and cleaned hundreds of pounds of fish over many years that were cooked and served at TCR's by dozens of mostly Bexar Grotto members.

Photo by Mike Harris

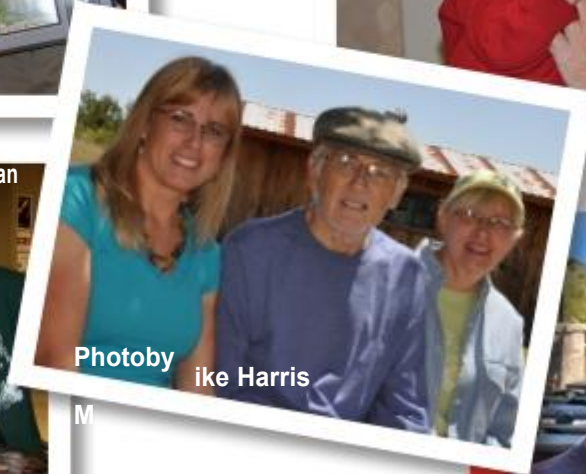


Photo by Mike Harris

Photo by Kevin McGowan



Photo by Mike Harris



I'll miss his campfire stories, but most of all I'll miss Bob's friendship. He was always there for me.

GEORGE VENI

My favorite story about Bob, and the one I've told the most, dealt with his outspoken personality, not his caving. Bob loved to talk but when he got serious, he was succinct and powerful. And sometimes unintentionally hilarious.

I don't recall what triggered it in this one instance, but Bob's reply was priceless:

"Look buddy, don't piss me off. I'm a Vietnam vet, I own a gun, and I work for the Post Office!"

Written tribute to Bob inside Bracken Bat Cave where he spent endless volunteer hours on the management, upkeep, fundraising, and educational outreach on the caves and its bats. -- GV



JILL ORR

Bob was the very first caver I spent time with after joining the grotto. We were at Robber Baron moving a rock pile for a surface clean up. I thought I had gotten most of his life story then - but after sharing a tent with him at Bracken to watch a morning bat return I realized he had only scratched the surface.

Bob talked to me all night long. I was too polite to tell him I had no idea what he was saying. I could barely stay awake to say "mmm" or "oh" whenever I thought I heard a pause in his story. I never saw that bat flight. We overslept. I miss him.

By the way, in the photo upper left taken at ICS in Kerville, Bob is handing me the flask -- JO
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