

# Doug Christensen—A Man of Many Firsts 1947-2016

By E. Lander Medlin

**D**oug Christensen—just the name evokes powerful memories in all who knew him. As a matter of fact, his memory is one we all wish to give tribute to, to formally recognize, to truly memorialize. As such, these are mine.



Photo by Anita Dosik

## A TRUE SERVANT LEADER

I studied under and was mentored by Doug Christensen, as many of you were as well. That journey started in 1987...yes, almost 30 years ago. He was already on his way to becoming a legend, yet, naively, I did not know it. Mainly because he was so humble, so warm and welcoming, so ready to help anyone willing to open their hearts and their minds to a creative visionary's ideas, philosophies, and principles. And so he was, the consummate "servant leader" with the emphasis on both words. A servant to everyone, a leader above all. In fact, he was the first of many firsts in terms of awards, achievements, and acclaim. To give structure to his legacy, I am reminded of one of my articles entitled "Leadership – The Head, The Hand, and The Heart." Of course I sought Doug's advice and wisdom in its development, so it has special meaning and relevance.

"Leadership is not about your position and vested authority. Leadership is about the influence and personal power you build over time with those whom you work or come into contact." Therefore, leadership requires a principled center, an openness to learning and new ideas, a passion for performance—real results, and an enduring, unshakable belief in people. All done with compassion and always in service to others. So it was with Doug. A "mountain of a man" who was able to move mountains (in this case, an entire profession) because he didn't care who got the credit.

## THE HEAD

Doug was a mental giant. So much so that many of us were continually amazed by how he could not only create a vision for the future, but strategically formulate the detailed data and information to rein-

vent it, to transform our industry, and, thereby change its culture.

For example, his ability to demonstrate “need” (not the dollars) as the basis for Brigham Young University’s institutional resource allocations was and still is genius. He aptly stated, *“Focusing on what the needs are is a much different process than trying to start at how many dollars you have and trying to maximize them.”* His ability to think effectiveness over efficiency was and is transformational genius. His ability to build a framework for asset management integrated decision making, which he began studying in the 1980s, was and is creative genius. All as the precursor to drive the Total Cost of Ownership model/principle for total asset management (not facilities management—it’s a much bigger, overall vision).

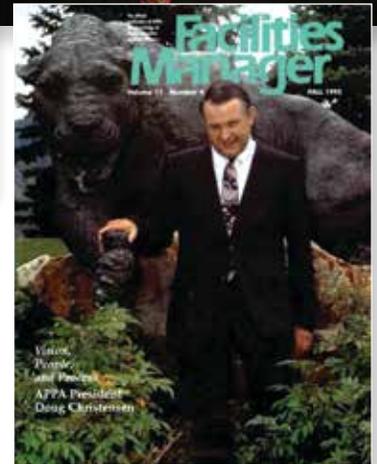
And, that’s just the tip of the iceberg concerning his impact on the facilities management profession. In his spare time, he launched APPA’s Professional Leadership Center so that we could further develop leadership skills (the Leadership Academy), further knowledge through research (the Center for Facilities Research—CFaR), and finally establish a mechanism for appropriate recognition (the Fellow designation). What a slacker!

#### THE HAND

Whether you view “the Hand” as a “helping hand” or a “pen in hand,” Doug accomplished both in spades. With “pen in hand” he authored or co-authored over 20 articles and several ground-breaking books that are still considered seminal pieces to this day. One in particular was his 1987 article entitled “Integrating Capital Studies within Physical Plant Organizations” which received the first Rex Dillow Award for Outstanding Article in APPA’s *Facilities Manager* magazine. To date, his focus on asset management has culminated in APPA’s Standards and Codes Council’s (ASCC) development of an ANSI standard that supports the application of TCO principles and practices within the facilities sector, entitled *APPA 1000 TCO for Facilities Asset Management*. This first standard will be dedicated to Doug’s memory.

No matter the moment, Doug was always willing to extend a helping hand. He was ready to listen

**And so he was, the consummate “servant leader” with the emphasis on both words.**



and give of his sage advice, and share his wisdom, and guidance. He could always be depended upon to support, encourage, and guide his colleagues and his family. He was indeed the guiding force behind so many others’ professional growth and development.

Taken directly from one of Doug’s *Facilities Manager* magazine articles (“Standing on Shoulders,” November/December 2009) he said,

*In every case, when you mention the profession, the association, or their contribution to the big picture, they have a story to tell. The stories always include a special moment, a caring person, or an event that allowed them to stand on the shoulders of those who offered helping hands, so that they could someday be in the position to return the favor. If you take time to look back at your journey, no matter how long or short it has been, you will see the helping hands or the encouraging lift from someone who helped with a difficult problem or taught you something that saves time and effort. I would like to say thanks to the many people who have helped me in all that I have attempted to do. The shoulders have been very broad and very strong.*

All of his accomplishments took incredible intellect and skill, it also took unbelievable heart.

## THE HEART

Looking back, it makes sense to me that Doug wrote that article (Standing on Shoulders), since that is quintessential Doug. The humble, unassuming gentleman who, to his death, gave praise to all those before him, and thanks for the opportunity to sit at the feet of remarkable leaders. Indeed, the shoulders—His SHOULDERS—have been very broad and very strong. And, as a result, we all stand a little higher, become a little smarter, and our day-to-day decision making a little better.

But frankly, Doug's drive for vision, and quest for data and information, all paled to his love for, value of, and belief in PEOPLE. In fact, he concluded his article in 1987 by saying, *"The computer is a tool and enables us to organize the information, but it's the people who make the capital needs program work at BYU."* That's one of the many statements throughout his entire career that captures his passion for people! His presidential theme in 1995-96 was *"Vision, People, and Process"* where he said, *"... more teamwork, energy, synergy...you're trying to*

*be there for the good of all...we're in this together and can't reach our common goals unless we do it together."*

It may sound a bit cliché, but it was the essence of everything he stood for over time. He said, *"The success of APPA is in the hearts and minds of those who belong...what a great opportunity it is to be part of APPA and to share with all the people who really make our profession what it is."* Doug won many awards, but his greater gift was how he treated people as he went about winning those awards.

The BYU Facilities Management department motto is *"What-é'er thou art, act well thy part"*. And so he did. Let's recount...

The number of "FIRST's"—every professional category of education, research, and recognition are astounding. And, as you can surmise, Doug has had an enormous impact and incredible influence, positively touching the lives of thousands of people worldwide.

As a facilities professional, Doug was the personification of leadership—a visionary, scholar and educator, trusted colleague and mentor.

As a family man, Doug was the quintessential sage—a brilliant advisor, a shining example...where worship was central.

As a friend, Doug epitomized friendship—unassuming, unconditional, and selfless.

In the BYU Visitors Center is a placard that says, *"Let your light so shine."* Indeed, the world is better place because of Doug; the association is a better place because of Doug; and I (and so many others) am a better person because of Doug.

His legacy will stand the test of time. ☪

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