

Dec. 19, 2011

To: News Media
From: The Sewerage & Water Board of N.O.
Re: Passing of G. Joseph Sullivan
Release Immediately
Contact: Robert Jackson, 269-7978 or
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G. Joseph Sullivan

A Remarkable 39 Years of Service To The Sewerage & Water Board

G. Joseph "Joe" Sullivan, who served as General Superintendent of the Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans for 36 years, passed away at on Saturday, December 17, 2011. He was 85 years old and survived by his wife, Estelle, and two children.

In 1972 Sullivan was appointed General Superintendent by Mayor Moon Landrieu. He was only the 5th person to occupy this position since 1899. For the last three years he served as General Superintendent Emeritus, working with new Superintendent Joseph R. Becker.

As General Superintendent, he oversaw the expansion of every system at the Board—water, sewerage, drainage and power generation.

Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu, President of the Sewerage & Water Board, said, "The City of New Orleans has lost a great man and a creative engineer who knew the challenges and solutions to the problems of our below-sea-level City better than anyone."

"His peers throughout the nation respected him and recognized him with numerous awards for the many innovations which helped make our one-of-a-kind water systems continue to serve us so well for so long."

Mayor Landrieu added, "He will be greatly missed by members of the Board, family, employees, friends and national and international colleagues who knew of his importance to the engineering community."

Sullivan led much of the post-Katrina recovery of the Board. This was no easy task. He was involved with the Corps of Engineers construction of flood gates at the 17th Street Canal and other outfall canals, the restoration of drainage and sewer pumping stations and treatment plants, power plant recovery, water distribution and a myriad of other on-going projects.

Upon his retirement in 2008, the Board honored him with an event at the World War II Museum which was attended by Board members, present and former employees, elected officials and other dignitaries he worked with over the years.

In January of 2009, Drainage Pumping Station No. 6 on the 17 St. Canal, the world's largest pumping station, was named in his honor.

Marcia St. Martin, S&WB Executive Director, said, "Under Mr. Sullivan's watch, much of our modern and efficient water, sewer and drainage systems were constructed. The Board, City and all citizens have benefited from his dedication, expertise, longevity and love for his work. He will be greatly missed, but will always be a part of the Sewerage & Water Board."

In 2003, he was honored By ASCE (American Society of Civil Engineers) with the ASCE Louisiana Section Outstanding Government Civil Engineer Award. He later received the New Orleans Branch Outstanding Government Civil Engineer Award.

Sullivan served in the Pacific during World War II as a gunner's mate, volunteering for five missions on Japanese held islands. He was captured on the island of Peleiu and underwent 15 months in captivity, losing 70 pounds. He was liberated only two days after the surrender was signed and spent six months of recuperation in the hospital.

Returning to school, he studied civil engineering at Tulane University, and graduated in 1950. He was employed by R. P. Farnsworth and Co., and remained with the firm for 15 years. In 1965 he joined George Farnsworth Construction Corp. as Vice-President and served in that capacity until the firm relocated to New York.

In 1968 he joined the New Orleans Regional Office of J. A. Jones Construction Co. as a Construction Manager, where he directed several major commercial and industrial project in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. In 1972 he was appointed General Superintendent.

At that time, the city was experiencing high water in the drainage canals due to trash blocking the screens at the intake of the major pumping stations. Sullivan developed a screen cleaner that brought the canal level down to the elevation of the pumping station intake pump which reduced labor and the cost of removing the debris by hand.

Working in a machine shop during his off-hours, he developed a valve to control water mains and sewer force mains wherein the valve seats close on an angle with the wedge. This method closes the disc valve with a force directly through the center of the disc. The valves are very easy to open and close.

Sullivan has received many awards for his technical expertise, lifetime accomplishments and contributions to his profession, including receipt of the Distinguished Service Award for Lifetime Membership in the American Public Works Association and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

His retirement in 2008 brought to an end more than 36 years of hands-on service, leadership and direction to the Sewerage and Water Board and over 50 years of service within the construction industry.

Mrs. St. Martin concluded, "The citizens of New Orleans are indebted to the Sullivan Family for allowing him to dedicate so much of his family time to his work."

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