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“

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Aloha, Steve Wingert

Writing this column can sometimes be a challenge. I've had cases of writer's block. Or, at the other extreme, I've struggled to settle on one or two key messages when there was so much to report. But this column is, by far, the hardest.

On March 18, Steven D. Wingert, CLM, ALA Past President, lost his courageous battle with pancreatic cancer. All of us who were fortunate to know him lost a true friend, leader and mentor. His membership profile lists countless volunteer positions, speaking engagements and accolades — all testament to the many contributions he made to the organization. Each year, I attend a leadership conference with the incoming ALA President. One of the exercises asks us each to think about a person who represents our mental model of leadership. Every year, without exception, for both the new president and me, that model has been Steve Wingert.

Therefore, it's no surprise that in 2015 Steve was awarded the Spirit of ALA Award, the Association's highest honor. The ALA Board of Directors created this award for individuals who demonstrate a special and unique achievement. Steve embodied all of these qualities.

Steve had just become ALA President in May 2012 when I was lucky enough to be chosen as ALA's Executive Director. That year, the Annual Conference & Expo was in Hawaii. I was hopeful the final-round interviews would be held in Honolulu; unfortunately, they were not. The O'Hare Crowne Plaza hotel does make a nice mai tai, though.

Shortly after the conference, in his first column for this magazine, Steve talked about the meaning of the Hawaiian word "aloha." The word consists of two parts: *ha*, which refers to the breath of life or the internal part of our being, and *alo*, which is how we carry ourselves on the outside — our demeanor and presence. As I discovered in my own research, it is a word rich and deep with meaning. Much more than a greeting, it is a way of living, an attitude. It conveys guidelines to help us live our lives. There is even a website, Live Aloha, dedicated to promoting this spirit and inspiring people to embody it in their everyday lives.

Here's what it says:

"Aloha means we are able to recognize and appreciate the uniqueness and differences each of us bring into this world. Honor and respect your family, friends, and all the people who pass through your life. Aloha does not pass judgment on others for it always trusts, always hopes and always protects.

It is that aloha, caring and spirituality that allows us to build on each other's strengths and join together on this magnificent journey we call 'Life.'"

And so it seems appropriate that his presidency began in the land of aloha, as his life and leadership exemplified all that the

word conveys. Steve will be terribly missed, but his impact on so many of our lives will always last.

Aloha, my friend.

CELEBRATING STEVE

Celebrations of life will be held on Saturday, April 27, at the Journeyman Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, from 4 to 8 p.m. and on Saturday, May 4, at Digress Wine in College Park, Florida, from 4 to 8 p.m. ■



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