

The finish line is in sight -Larry Sharpe Retires – He's run a good race.

Larry Sharpe, District Conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will retire on January 3, 2008. Larry has served as NRCS District Conservationist, assigned to assist the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District for the past 23 years.

Many producers and land owners have benefited from Larry's hard work and efforts. He says that his goal has always been to serve the public. He doesn't consider himself a political person even though he is an employee of the federal government. Helping individuals that ask for assistance and looking out for their interests is what Larry's mission has been while serving as District Conservationist. He believes the individual's needs are important and while the government is his bread and butter, it's the little guy who gets the majority of his attention.

Originally from Polk County, Larry graduated from the University of South Florida, with a major in zoology. At that time, Larry was seriously considering environmental law and went to law school for one and a half years at night while working during the day. Then a choice was offered to him; either enlist or be drafted. Therefore, Larry joined the Air Force. He already had a pilot's license and went to pilot training while serving in the armed forces.

After serving his country, Larry returned to Lake County where his family owned a ranch. He saw an advertisement with the Soil Conservation Service (now called the Natural Resource Conservation Service). Unfortunately, there were no vacancies in his area. However, while he was looking for a job, his family decided to sell the ranch and move to the pan handle. Larry moved with them and got a position teaching school. The pay was very low and he decided to look for a position with better pay. It was at that time that Larry found a position with the Soil Conservation Service in Alabama.

He secured the position as a Soil Conservation Technician and was promoted after six months to Soil Conservationist. The opportunity came to him to transfer to Limestone County in Northern Alabama, a place he described as "the coldest spot in Alabama." He decided to move to sunny Florida instead and took a position in Tavares in Lake County, his old stompin' grounds. Larry served as Soil Conservationist there for one and a half years when a position for District Conservationist opened up in Okeechobee County. He applied and got the position.

Four years later, a District Conservationist position opened up in Sebring and the rest, as they say, is history. Larry has served Highlands County since 1984 and his upcoming retirement is well deserved.

Since the days of his youth, Larry has had a background in ranching. His family has been in the ranching business and he feels comfortable in the agricultural setting. He has been around farms and farm animals since 1960 and he plans to "piddle around the farm" once he retires.

Larry and his wife of 34 years plan to move to Alabama in the near future. Once there, they will reside on the family owned farm and enjoy retirement. Larry's wife, Deanna has been a Guidance Counselor with the Okeechobee School district since 1980. They have two children Phillip and Victoria and one grand child who is two years old.

Larry enjoys NASCAR and restoring old cars. He also likes to hunt and fish, but says he hasn't had much time for that. Hopefully, retirement will allow him the time to enjoy his hobbies and activities.

The Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District staff will surely miss Larry. But we know that he is looking forward to his retirement and we wish him well.