

## ***SOUTHEASTERN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE BUSINESS MEETING 2020 MEMORIAL RESOLUTIONS***

Sherwood (“Woody”) Gagliano (by Rich Weinstein, Coastal Environments)

**Sherwood M. “Woody” Gagliano, Ph.D.  
December 10, 1935 — July 17, 2020**

Woody Gagliano passed away on July 17 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He was a long-time member of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, a co-founder of the Louisiana Archaeological Society, and President/CEO and co-founder of Coastal Environments, Inc., (CEI) in Baton Rouge. Woody received his B.S. (1959), M.S. (1963) and Ph.D. (1967) from Louisiana State University where he studied geology, geography, and anthropology, culminating in a dissertation on the archaeological and paleontological remains on Avery Island, a salt dome on the coast of Louisiana, particularly on material retrieved from a new mine shaft that was being excavated to reach the island’s salt deposits.

From a very young age, Woody had a deep interest in the geology and archaeology of Louisiana. He was born and raised in New Orleans, and became a childhood friend of the late Roger T. Saucier, who went on to become a noted geologist and archaeologist in his own right. As boys, Woody and Roger convinced their parents to take them to the numerous shell middens and mounds in southeastern Louisiana, especially around Lake Pontchartrain. One story, which probably has a grain of truth in it, tells how Woody and Roger decided one day to travel across Lake Pontchartrain to visit some of the Indian sites on the lake’s north shore. Instead of asking their parents to drive them to the other side of the lake, however, they decided to take a canoe (another version of the story says it was a small flat-bottom rowboat). Regardless, Woody and Roger made it to the other side of the lake, visited some sites, but then got caught in bad weather on the return trip. How those two made it back alive with the waves kicking up in the lake is anyone’s guess. But they survived. One can only image how different archaeological and geological research within Louisiana and the Lower Mississippi Valley might be today if Woody and Roger had not survived that adventure.

Woody was always interested in the study of Paleoindian and Archaic cultures, and was one of the first archaeologists to argue for the antiquity of mounds in the Southeast. His study in the 1960s of several mounds along the lower Amite River suggested that they likely dated back four or five thousand years, as did a number of other mounds in Louisiana, including the Banana Bayou mound on Avery Island, the Monte Sano Mounds in Baton Rouge, and the LSU Campus Mounds. Many archaeologists scoffed at his ideas, until decades later when detailed research by other archaeologists proved that there are, indeed, mounds in Louisiana and the Southeast that date back 5,000 years or more.

It was Woody’s vast knowledge of early prehistoric cultures and the geology of the Gulf Coast that inspired the National Park Service in the mid-1970s to ask for his help in finding archaeological sites now submerged in the Gulf of Mexico due to sea-level rise at the end of the Pleistocene. Such sites, which no one knew anything about, had the potential to be damaged or destroyed by offshore oil and gas activities. That request led to over 10 years of research in which Woody and other archaeologists and geologists at CEI were instrumental in developing an approach that employed the locations of early sites on land as analogs to where similar sites should be found out in the Gulf. Woody also devised a method for analyzing solid cores to search for the elusive evidence needed to identify now-submerged archaeological sites. Eventually, that study led to the discovery of an 8,000-year-old archaeological site buried under about 20 feet of sediment about six miles off the mouth of the Sabine River. To this day, the reports generated by that research still are used by archaeologists in their attempts to locate drowned archaeological sites across the Gulf and elsewhere in the U.S.

While Woody's legacy as an archaeologist and geologist are likely well-known to members of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, his contributions to the understanding of coastal erosion in Louisiana and his decades-long effort to make the problem known to the public and state and federal authorities are probably less known. In fact, in one article that appeared in *The Advocate*, Baton Rouge's major newspaper, three days following Woody's death, he was referred to as the "Paul Revere" of coastal land loss and credited with being the first person to document the rapidity and severity of Louisiana's eroding coastline (Schleifstein 2020). A week later, Woody was recognized in the "Commentary" section of *The Advocate* for his perseverance in the fight to save Louisiana's disappearing coast: "Indeed, the name 'Woody' became synonymous with coastal research and using science to speak the truth to the most powerful interests in Louisiana" (Marshall 2020).

Woody's accomplishments in archaeology, geology, and geography were many, and he received numerous awards in recognition of those achievements. Among the many are the following: "James A. Ford Award" in 1982 by the Louisiana Archaeological Society; "Coastal Stewardship Award" in 1996 by the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana; "Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2012 by Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana; "Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2018 from the Southwest American Association of Geographers; and "Distinguished Alumnus Award" in 2018 by the LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology.

Woody is survived by his wife Betty, his son Mark, his daughter-in-law Kristie, and his granddaughter Marguerite Lucy Gagliano.

## References

Marshall, Bob

2020 Woody Gagliano Raised Awareness on Disappearing La. Coast. *The Advocate* 26 July:7B. Baton Rouge.

Schleifstein, Mark

2020 Sherwood Gagliano Dead at 84: Scientist Remembered as "Paul Revere" of Coastal Land Loss. *The Advocate* 20 July:3B. Baton Rouge.

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*Whereas*, Sherwood "Woody" Gagliano spent a lifetime studying prehistory and geology of Louisiana; and

*Whereas*, Woody developed valuable innovations in the discovery and study of drowned archaeological sites; and

*Whereas*, Woody was a fierce advocate for the conservation and stewardship of Louisiana's coastal lands; and

*Whereas*, Woody was honored with awards for his extended and valuable work from the Louisiana Archaeological Society, the Southwest American Association of Geographers, the LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology, and the Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana; then

*Therefore, be it resolved* that the Southeastern Archaeological Conference mourns the loss of our extraordinary colleague and innovative researcher, and expresses our condolences to his family and friends.



Woody Gagliano (right) receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Dept. of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University, 2018

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