

## **Stan Oken Biography**

**Stan Oken's background is extremely diverse as a result of his experience in the military, public education, business, camp director, coaching and public service. In 1928 he was born in the back of a linoleum store in the inner city of Chicago and spent his early childhood years in the high-risk neighborhood of East Los Angeles.**

**As a teen-ager his mother was bedridden for many years and died at the early age of 42. Stan started paying his own way at home by working his way through school starting at age of 12.**

**Always being the shortest in school Stan felt he could be as good as any big person. He challenged adversity head on by playing the "big man's game of basketball" and went on to compete in other sports. Stan played basketball and baseball while earning a Bachelor of Science Degree at Cal State Los Angeles.**

**Using athletics as a vehicle to further his education, and his knowledge and enthusiasm for using athletics to reach young people led him to become an educator and coach at the high school and college levels. Stan was elected captain and lettered in both baseball and basketball.**

**At the end of World War II, his education was interrupted when he enlisted to serve in the 1st Cavalry Division of the U.S. Army.**

**After he left the service and completed his education Stan coached and was elected by his fellow coaches to chair the athletic department. For 19 years he coached 13 championship teams as a basketball, baseball, and track and football coach on both the high school and college levels. While in Los Angeles, he coached city, state and national champion track stars in hurdles, high jump and pole vault.**

**In 1967 Stan and two fellow coaches started Western Camps Inc. DBA River Way Ranch Summer Resident Camp on leased land in Three Rivers, Calif.**

After many years of coaching, his interest in directing children's camps as a way to teach children self-confidence, self worth, values and meeting challenges grew. In 1973 although a risk, he resigned his coaching duties, cashed in all his teachers retirement earnings, bought 100% of Western Camps stock from his partners and purchased Wonder Valley Dude Ranch to accommodate the children's camp. He still serves as Chairman of the Board.

The camp and resort business grew but not without determination to make it succeed. Whether it was washing dishes, making beds, tending bar, or cooking in the kitchen, he did what had to be done. Even when down to his last dollars, he never gave up and did not quit.

It was also during that time that he became a foster parent to many teenage children who were at risk. Taking them into his home, He fought their battles with them to see that these children became productive members of society as adults.

Stan said, "I never knew how taking in foster children affected my own three children." It was not until his children started taking foster children of their own that he realized his influence and dedication to children did not stop with him.

Wonder Valley grew from 17 rooms and 4 employees to 56 rooms and 200 employees in the peak season. Western Camps Inc. expanded to a full-service resort and 6 camps: A Ranch Camp, Water-ski Camp, Theater Arts Camp, Horse Camp, USC family Camp, Fresno State University Bulldog Family Camp and now known as Wonder Valley Family Camp.

For the past 26 years, The Oken Family hosts approximately 200 children who are survivors of fires at Champ Camp. There is no cost to the campers.

Stan signed the Olympic Gymnast, Cathy Rigby and owned the Cathy Rigby Gymnastic Camp. Stan also brought the U.S. National and German cycling teams and sponsored the first cycling races in Fresno County. He had a contract with USC to run their Family Camp at Wonder Valley for 16 years.

In 1987, Stan developed a youth drug prevention project which he presented in Washington D.C. and was then invited to share his project with a group of educators in The Soviet Union. His visit to The

Soviet Union resulted in The Oken family sponsoring the first delegation of Russian children to a U.S. Camp since the cold war started. His camps still bring children from as many as 13 foreign countries every year.

Stan and his wife Dorothy have three children and 11 grand children, 6 that work in the family business. Before he ran for public office his three children were trained to operate the business. Stan's supports and encourages nepotism, with many from the same family working together. Chef Torres has worked for 33 years at Wonder Valley has 15 from his family working at the Ranch. Wonder Valley employees have their in-laws, aunts and uncles and grandparents all working in the business.

In 1991, upon the death of former Supervisor Judy Andreen, Stan decided to run for that seat. After a heated primary with nine candidates and general election Stan defeated Larry Linder with 58% of the vote and was elected to fill out the one year left on Supervisor Andreen's term. In November he was sworn in and had to run for a full 4-year term in Feb. 1992. He beat Gordon Thor with 73% of the vote. In 1996 Stan was opposed by Bob Waterston and won his third election with 60% of the vote. No other candidate in Fresno County had to run 5 primary and general campaigns in 5 years.

**STAN OKEN PRESENTLY SERVES ON THE FOLLOWING BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

- ❑ **CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF WESTERN CAMPS INC. DBA WONDER VALLEY RESORT, RIVER WAY RANCH CAMPS**
- ❑ **INVESTOR AND FORMALLY TRUSTEE FOR WILD WATER ADVENTURES WATER PARK**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN OF THE FRESNO GRIZZLIES ADVISORY BOARD.**
- ❑ **FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE**
- ❑ **POLITICAL ANALYST ON KYNO RADIO CALLED "STAN OKEN AND THAT'S HOW I SEE IT"**

**FORMALLY SERVED ON THE FOLLOWING BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:**

- ❑ **CHAIRMAN AND FOUNDER OF SAN JOAQUIN POLITICAL ACADEMY.**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF DOMUS MITIS "HOME OF GENTLENESS FOR ABUSED AND ABANDONED INFANTS."**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN LAFCO**
- ❑ **LEAD NEGOTIATOR FOR FRESNO COUNTY DEALING WITH 15 CITIES IN LAND USE ANNEXATIONS AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.**
- ❑ **VICE CHAIR OF "INTER-AGENCY COUNCIL FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES"**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN OF "YOUTH FIRST" FORMALLY FRESNO TOMORROW**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND VICE CHAIR OF FRESNO COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY GOVERNMENTS.**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND MEMBER OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF "CALIFORNIA STATE ASSOCIATIONS OF COUNTIES"**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY COUNTY SUPERVISORS ASSOC**
- ❑ **FRESNO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS 1991 TO 2000**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN OF BOARD OF SUPERVISORS 1993 AND 1997**
- ❑ **DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE FOR REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER**
- ❑ **COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN PUBLIC HEARINGS ON CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN OF FRESNO CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU**
- ❑ **CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU BOARD OF DIRECTORS 1984 TO 2003**
- ❑ **CHAIRMAN AUDIT, LEGISLATIVE AND TOURISM COMMITTEES FOR THE CONVENTION, VISITORS BUREAU.**
- ❑ **10 YEARS ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE HOTEL, MOTEL ASSOCIATION**
- ❑ **HE FORMED AND SERVED AS THE FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU.**

## **AWARDS AND MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**

- ❑ **STAN WAS PRESENTED AN HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREE FOR HIS WORK WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF FIRES AND BURN ACCIDENTS.**
- ❑ **STAN WAS THE RECIPIENT AN AWARD FROM THE FRESNO COUNTY CHAMBER FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE VISITOR INDUSTRY.**
- ❑ **BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF DOMUS MITIS 20 YEARS. WORKING WITH THE FRESNO RESCUE MISSION HELPED RAISE \$3,250,000 AND DEVELOPED FRESNO'S 1<sup>ST</sup> HOME FOR HOMELESS MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN. NO TAX MONEY INVOLVED.**
  
- ❑ **PRIVATIZATION OF VALLEY MEDICAL CENTER**
- ❑ **AFTER FORTY YEARS HELPED INITIATE THE START OF FREEWAY 168 AND 180**
- ❑ **INITIATED THE OPENING OF FRESNO COUNTY BOOT CAMP IN CARUTHERS**
- ❑ **INITIATED TRANSFERRING FUNDS FOR MANDATED STATE PROGRAMS TO PROGRAMS BETTER FOR FRESNO.**
- ❑ **STATE LEGISLATION ALLOWING FRESNO TO BLEND FUNDS WITH OTHER TAX SUPPORTED AGENCIES TO PROVIDE BETTER PROGRAMS.**

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