

Former NAADAC President Left his Mark on the Profession

He served as a colonel in the U.S. Air Force. He was an addiction counselor at a time when society didn't know what that meant. He co-founded the professional association for addiction counselors. And he was an advocate for people suffering with substance use disorders and the professionals who serve them.

Colonel Mel Schulstad (retired) was the co-founder and past-president of [NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals](#), a co-author of two significant books, *Under the Influence* (1984) and *Beyond the Influence* (2000) and lent his name to the award that recognized professional excellence.

He was born in Duluth, Minn., in 1918, as Louis Melvin Schulstad. The youngest of 10 children, he spent most of his youth in Reynolds, N.D.

Col. Schulstad came to the addiction profession from an unusual starting point: the U.S. Air Force. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1939, and flew 44 missions over France and Germany as a B-17 bomber pilot during World War II. He was twice awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for valor in combat.

After 27 years in the Air Force he retired in 1966. He spent six years in Seattle and eventually moved to Virginia, hoping to use his own recovery from alcoholism as a tool to help others suffering from the disease.

He had been active in service work within a recovery fellowship and started working as a volunteer in the newly implemented Fairfax Hospital alcohol program. Col. Schulstad worked with clients who were hungry for more information about their illness. As their knowledge increased, so did the demands on his time and he began working as a paid counselor in Arlington County in 1973.

“We were called alcoholism counselors, but we were such novices,” said Col. Schulstad in an interview with William White. “Our duties were ill-defined, we worked endless hours, and we were paid a pittance, but it was the beginning of what we started calling a new profession.”

In 1974, the National Association of Alcoholism Counselors and Trainers (NAACT) was formed, which evolved into the National Association of Alcoholism Counselors two years later, and in 1982, the current National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC).

The Virginia Association of Alcoholism Counselors (VAAC) - now the Virginia Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors (VAADAC) - came into being during this period and would ultimately leave a lasting impression on the national scene. Edward Riordan, who served as Executive Director of VAAC, would later become the Executive Director of NAAC, and Col. Schulstad, the first President of VAAC, would become the first President of NAAC.

After he completed his term as President, Col. Schulstad remained influential within the association. Beginning in 1979, [NAADAC's professional of the year award](#), created by a core of professionals led by

The Alcoholism Report

editor Jay Lewis, was named after Mel Schulstad. The award was established to recognize individuals who had made outstanding and sustained contributions to the advancement of the addiction counseling profession. Col. Schulstad took great pleasure in recognizing the excellence of outstanding professionals, and attended NAADAC conferences so he could personally present the award named in his honor.

Recognizing that he had witnessed history in the making, Col. Schulstad served on the NAADAC Archives Advisory Council, established under the auspices of the [NAADAC Education and Research Foundation \(NERF\)](#)

. As a part of this initiative, NAADAC established its archives at the Library of Virginia, where they preserve the record of the establishment and growth of the association and the profession.

Col. Schulstad chaired the NAADAC Archives Advisory Council responsible for finding a suitable repository for [NAADAC's archives](#) and culling and organizing thousands of pieces of paper for inclusion in the collection. Another association co-founder, Marcia Lawton, PhD, was instrumental in developing NAADAC's relationship with the

[Library of Virginia](#)

. Jay Lewis, founding Editor of the Alcoholism Report, also had a critical role as he researched and wrote a narrative to accompany the archives and assist future researchers.

In recognition of their hard work, the prestigious Paper Cut award was given to Dr. Lawton and Col. Schulstad for their hours and hours of hands-on work at the NAADAC national office sorting and organizing the association's history.

In 2007, Col. Schulstad joined the drive to purchase a permanent home for the association. He served as a Co-Chair of NAADAC's fundraising program, along with Tom Van Wagner of Van Wagner Insurance and pledged his personal support for the initiative.

Age began to take its toll on Col. Schulstad's health and he announced that the 2008 NAADAC Annual Meeting would be the last one that he would attend.

He remained upbeat, telling participants in Overland Park, Kansas, "I respect you, I honor you and I love you."

"You might say, why is that? Because you have had the courage to take on this new, wonderful and unique profession, the profession of giving counseling, healing, recovery and new life to addicts and alcoholics who come to you for help. You perform miracles."

During his lifetime, Col. Schulstad had won ten local and national awards for his work in the addiction-recovery movement and was made an honorary lifetime member of NAADAC in 2008.

Col. Schulstad will be greatly missed by NAADAC and the rest of the addiction community, but his hard work, dedication and spirit will live on.

He is survived by his wife Lee; his brother Thomas J. Schulstad; his four children: Jon Schulstad (Lt. Col. U.S.AF, ret), Martha Hyde, Eric Schulstad and Christina Schulstad; two

stepchildren: Philese Selden and Sharon Kozik; five grandchildren, two step grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

This information was compiled from NAADAC files, from William White's interview with Mel Schulstad found at www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/2011%20Mel%20Schulstad.pdf and the Seattle Times.

-30-