



Dean Ray Staples

June 29, 1960 - June 18, 2024

Animikii shookate pizhikii inini, Dean Staples, age 63, of Hinckley, MN, passed away on June 18, 2024. A Funeral Ceremony will be held at 10 AM on Saturday, June 22, 2024, at the Meshakwad Center. Visitation will begin at 8 PM on Friday, June 21, 2024, at the Meshakwad Center. Interment will be in the Stevens Lake Cemetery.

Dean Staples was born on June 29, 1960, to George and Frances (Reynolds) Staples. His career with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe spanned over 25 years, where he left an enduring legacy at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and later at Grand Casino.

Dean was a highly experienced mechanic and had the fortitude and determination to fix, repair, or build anything. His strong, can-do attitude carried over to his medical challenges, where he demonstrated extraordinary courage and willpower, navigating all of life's obstacles with a hopeful and positive outlook that inspired all who knew him. Dean loved his family and made sure to share his windfalls with them. He always made sure they were provided for, whether it was food, such as homemade sausages and freeze-dried items, or an uplifting and supportive conversation. His family was his strength. Dean will be remembered for his generous heart, willingness to help others in need, a loyal friend, and loving family member.

Dean's impact stretched far beyond his immediate circle. Dean was a trail-blazer who created and led the Mille Lacs Band DNR's first tribal fire program, a ground-breaking initiative that was also the first tribal fire program in the United States. His colleagues credit him with having saved thousands of acres of Band land in all three districts from being destroyed by fire over the years that he ran the program. Dean was also nationally known and respected by tribes across the nation. Outside of his colleagues, many were unaware that Dean was considered by tribes to be the fire expert in all of Indian country, and was the person other tribes would call when they had questions about fire plans and fire management. Dean was generous with his time and expertise with other tribes. As one of his colleagues said, "Dean was a big deal" in Indian country's natural resource circles.

Besides being accomplished in his work, Dean was a role model for others and his team looked up to him. He always worked from a cultural perspective, was an excellent leader, and had a reputation as someone who always offered realistic solutions to every problem. He was respected for his honesty, always say exactly what was on his mind. In tense situations, he had the courage to state what everyone else was thinking, too. Dean was also known in the DNR for relishing coffee. DNR staff could depend on Dean for making the first pot in the morning, and making sure there was a fresh pot of coffee on throughout the whole day, even if he was the only one drinking it.

Dean loved his work and would make great personal sacrifices to help others. Under Dean's leadership, he and his fire team were often deployed across the country to fight forest and wildland fires that threatened other communities, usually in the middle of spring or summer when the weather was nice at home. Leading his fire team through perilous conditions to protect communities across the country, he worked tirelessly, often enduring grueling 15-hour days amidst heat, smoke, and dust, sometimes for weeks at a time. His colleagues credit the pristine state of Mille Lacs Band wildlands today as

being greatly influenced by Dean Staples' management and protection of them, and would not be as resilient today if it were not for his dedicated efforts.

Dean will be fondly remembered not only for his professional achievements and sacrifices, but also for his generous spirit, selflessness, unwavering loyalty to friends, family, and his enduring impact on the Mille Lacs Band community and beyond. His legacy of courage, compassion, and dedication will continue to inspire for generations to come.

Dean is survived by his daughter, Dena (Arielle) Staples; siblings, Temperance McLain, Denise (Mark) Chamblin, Melanie Benjamin, Marvin Staples, Bernadine Roberts, Arlene Victor and Brandon Benjamin.

Dean was preceded in death by his parents, George and Frances (Reynolds) Staples; siblings, Mervin Staples, George Staples, Arnold "Sonny" Victor, Francine Staples, Montgomery Staples.