

IN MEMORIAM:

Constantine P. "Chic" Chaconas

Dr. Constantine P. "Chic" Chaconas—a pioneer of grassroots political action in defense of the Second Amendment whose work laid the foundation for transforming the NRA—died Feb. 13 in Silver Spring, Md. Chaconas, an oral surgeon, served on the NRA Board of Directors from 1978-80 and 1996-1997, with duties on the Association's Legal Action, Protest, Legislative Policy, Elections, Grassroots Development and Nominating committees. He was 90.

In 1969—outraged when U.S. Sen. Joseph D. Tydings, D-Md., declared that his re-election would be a referendum on federal gun registration and licensing of gun owners—Chaconas recruited more than 400 volunteers statewide and organized "Citizens Against Tydings," perhaps the first single-issue, non-partisan, grassroots campaign organization expressly designed to defeat a national figure.

At that time, the NRA stayed out of election issues. Undiscouraged, Chaconas waged asymmetrical warfare on a shoestring budget. A list of Maryland hunting license purchasers was obtained for targeted direct-mail postcards. Contributions-in-kind from printers generated 500,000 day-glo "IF TYDINGS WINS, YOU LOSE!" bumper



stickers. Landowners along commuter routes were persuaded to erect billboards, and—just before the election—sympathetic local media produced two weeks of radio spots and full-page newspaper ads.

Widely regarded by the national press as "unbeatable," Tydings lost the election to an obscure

challenger by 27,000 votes. Chaconas' determination proved the potential of grassroots action in electoral politics. Within a few years, NRA directors created the Institute for Legislative Action and its Political Victory Fund—turning the Association into the political powerhouse it is today.

Chaconas, who shot skeet and trap, was very involved with the Izaak Walton League, serving as a chapter president multiple times and leading a fundraising effort that garnered enough money to build a new club in Damascus, Md.

Chaconas loved working with his hands, helping his grandchildren build birdhouses and constructing a single-seat wood airplane that he piloted. Later, he started building a two-seater pontoon plane, but health concerns prevented him from finishing that.

Chaconas is survived by his wife of 63 years, Jo-an; his children, Peter and Kathleen; and six grandchildren. 