

# Edward Schafer

## African king savors royal life in west county

Being knighted by the Republic of Poland didn't go to Edward Charles Schafer's head. But then, he was already a king.

"King Edward" or "Sir Edward" - take your pick - has become somewhat accustomed to the royal life ... now. At first it was something of a shock to Schafer, a public relations field consultant who lives in west county.

"Congratulations, your majesty, they've just elected you king."

That was the phone call Schafer received in 1964 from Les Carmichael, a former KMOX sportscaster, when word got out that the African nation of Biffeche chose Schafer as its sovereign.

Schafer hadn't even been eyeing any African throne.

In fact, all he had done was chair a committee trying to help the struggling tribe make a living on some semi-arid land on the delta of the Senegal River.

Schafer got talked into discussing the tribe's troubles a year earlier on his show on WEW radio.

He had no particular affection for Biffeche.

But when the tribe seceded from Senegal after a quarrel about a broken tractor, Schafer topped the list of potential leaders. That's mostly because Schafer's name was also first on a list of members of the Committee for Biffeche. And when the tribe's members wanted to know who had helped them the most, a French missionary priest circled Schafer's name.

"I was sort of in a state of wonderment what to do," Schafer says.

Schafer, who doesn't like to fly, has seen his subjects only in photos, and he's anything but fluent in the tribe's native language of Ouloff. A visit would be difficult anyway, he says.

By tribal custom, the king would have to ride

into the 3-square-mile nation on a camel. "They didn't have a camel," Schafer says. "And there's no rent-a-camel."

Schafer "rules" the African nation by mail. "If something urgent comes up, we use telephone," he says.

But day-to-day operations are handled by a tribesman and a Catholic missionary, Schafer says.

Schafer's ascension to the throne created quite a stir, he says. The State Department allowed Schafer to be king and retain his U.S. citizenship, but the political repercussions were the least of it, he says.

As the only American king, Schafer was an instant celebrity.

"All this mail came pouring into St. Louis addressed to 'King Edward, St. Louis, Mo.,'" he says.

One letter from Poland really caught Schafer's attention. "I want to spy for you behind Iron Curtain," it read. "Please reply."

He didn't.

Although the novelty of his rule has died down by now, Schafer still lives with all the protocol that goes with the job.

Schafer must host official receptions, give advance notice when he wishes to attend church and be driven by a chauffeur in one of his two black Cadillacs, he says.

But if the tribesmen have complicated Schafer's life, they've also given him an appreciation of a simpler one, he says.

Schafer and his helpers have given them designs for an irrigation system, and help for growing citrus fruits, rice and cotton, he says.

"We made them self-sufficient," he says.

Helping others is one of the reasons Schafer was knighted this spring by the exiled Republic of Poland, which commended him for his outstanding leadership in both international and local community affairs.

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