

J. Leon Chandler

(1922 - 2004)

After graduating from high school in Missouri and a year of business school, he came to Cortland as a 19 year old to visit his cousin. That cousin was Cortland State football coach Carl “Chugger” Davis for which the Cortland State Athletics Administration Building is named after. While visiting, Leon answered an ad in the local newspaper for an accounting job with the Cortland Line Company. He started work in 1941 a few days after the December 7th attack on Pearl Harbor. After about a year working at the Cortland Line Company, he found himself attached to Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines as an Army Signal Corps cryptographer.

After the war was over, he returned to Cortland and continued working for the Cortland Line Company until his retirement in 1992. During those 50 years, Leon Chandler put Cortland on the world map demonstrating and teaching fly fishing.



Leon is with the president of Finland in 1961 at the International Trade Exposition in Finland.



Leon (l) with Ted Williams (r) a good friend and fishing partner.

He was given the unofficial title of “America’s Fly Fishing Ambassador.” His visits behind the Iron Curtain to Poland and Hungary, at the invitation of the U. S Department of Commerce, found him demonstrating US fishing tackle to hundreds of thousands of international trade show visitors. Perhaps his greatest personal influence to the sport of fly fishing came with numerous visits to Japan starting in 1972. Prior to his demonstrations and clinics throughout Japan, there were perhaps only 300 fly fishers in Japan. By some estimates, there are now over a half million.

Leon’s story and pictures were provided by his son, J. Kim Chandler.

Professional Angler Makes Hit in Poland

CORTLAND, N. Y. (AP)—This is the kind of life Leon Chandler has led—

He went directly from college to a career of fishing for pay. He's only 38 and isn't thinking of retiring. Just what would he retire to?

He is the vice-president of a company that makes fishing lines and as such he has visited virtually every lake and stream in the United States and many throughout the world. He's just returned home from an international fair at Poznan, Poland, where he represented 30 American firms and the fishing gear they make.

Fishing in Poland, as in the United States, is the country's greatest participant sport. There are these differences. In the U. S. fishing must compete with golf, bowling, tennis, motoring and TV watching for the angler's time. In Poland there are few if any distractions. Besides that, a successful Polish fisherman eats better. Meat is scarce.

The Poles, then, were more than just interested in what Chandler had to show. They were amazed. What Americans consider commonplace, such as a push button spinning reel, is regarded as extreme luxury there. And the inexpensive lures, flies and special lines Americans take for granted are either non-existent or, when available, priced beyond Polish reach.

News of the amazing American fishing tackle spread like wildfire in Poland. Visiting UMSM Sen. Philip Hart, D-Mich., was told by a train engineer some 500 miles from Poznan that the U. S. fishing exhibit was the best thing at the International Fair.

And a group of Russian army officers, including a general, requested a special demonstration by Chandler. He obliged.



This picture was taken at the fair in Poland described by the newspaper article on the left.

Leon Chandler served as National President of Trout Unlimited for two years in 1979 & 1980 and served as an at-large National Director for 22 years. In 1988, he was inducted into the National

Fishing Hall of Fame as a legendary angler. A quote from Leon Chandler as he attended the re-naming of the Fall Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited to the Leon Chandler Chapter several years ago says a lot. "When I have a chance, I tell the city fathers of Cortland that Cortland Line Co. does more to promote the name "CORTLAND" than anyone else. If you ask a fisherman in England, Iceland, Australia,



Russia, Japan, South Africa--or most any other place in the world--what the name "Cortland" means, he will tell you it means *fine fishing lines*. He doesn't know, and perhaps doesn't care that there is a city in upstate New York named Cortland. When I was traveling overseas a lot, I sometimes had people ask

"Was the Company named after the City, or was the City named after the Company?"

While his work called him to all corners of the world, his home in Homer on Ferndale Lane served as a launching site for frequent visits to his favorite local fishing locations such as Factory Brook, Tully Lake and Preble Creek. There currently is a New York historical marker along the banks of Factory Brook in Homer.



Leon fishing with his grandson Stephen

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