



AS AN ENTHUSIAST OF WESTERN HISTORY, ALTIMARI PREPARES FOR THE BATTLE OF LITTLE BIG HORN.



IN HIS DUTIES AS A HERPETOLOGIST AT THE ARIZONA-SONORA MUSEUM, ALTIMARI PREPARES TO EXTRACT POISON FROM A SNAKE.



AS A ZOO CURATOR IN PHILADELPHIA IN 1976, ALTIMARI WORKED WITH KUNDUR AND OTHER BIG CATS.

# A union soldier, scientist and scholar

HORSES, TIGERS, SNAKES AND ALLIGATORS ARE ALL IN THE FAMILY FOR LOCAL 99 MEMBER BILL ALTIMARI

**B**ill Altimari, a herpetologist at the Arizona-Sonora Museum in Tucson, calls his lifelong interest in snakes an almost genetic disposition.

“Ever since I can remember, I’ve been fascinated by reptiles,” Altimari said. “My life’s avocation can serve as an object lesson to parents: Don’t forbid your kids to have snakes as pets. They’ll probably grow up to be herpetologists.”

Altimari grew up in Philadelphia, Penn., and majored in anthropology and archaeology at the University of Pennsylvania.

His first job was at the Philadelphia Zoo.

“I was a zoo keeper and worked with a variety of animals,” he recalled. “I loved working with all of them, especially the big cats.”

Altimari said he developed a special relationship with the lions and tigers in his charge.

“They are very friendly and intelligent creatures,” he said. “They knew who I was and would react to my presence. When I came back to visit after several years, those I took care of remembered me and greeted me warmly.”

Altimari has worked at the museum since his arrival in Arizo-

na in 1992.

“My wife [Barbara] and I came out here on vacation and fell in love with the state,” Altimari said.

He said he has grown to love the reptiles in his care as much as he loved working with his big cats.

“Handling snakes can be dangerous,” he said. “So you have to be careful and treat them with respect.”

Altimari has been a member of UFCW Local 99 since he began working at the museum.

“My father was a union man,” he said. “He worked in a brewery and always spoke about how important it was for him to be in a union.

“I was a member of a union when I worked at the Philadelphia Zoo, so I knew that unions mean better wages and benefits. That’s why I joined Local 99 soon after I began working at the museum.”

Altimari said he has worked at non-union places where

*‘I wanted to be the one representing my co-workers if they were called in by management.’*



workers were victimized by managers.

“When you aren’t covered by a union contract, you can be harassed and treated unfairly simply because a supervisor doesn’t like you,” Altimari said. “That doesn’t happen when you work under a union contract.”

He previously served Local 99 as a steward for more than 10 years.

“I wanted to be the one representing my co-workers if they were called in by management,” he said. “I wanted to ensure that they knew they weren’t alone and that the union supported them.”

Altimari has other interests besides helping co-workers and studying snakes. He is the author of two historical novels, available on Amazon.com: *Legion*, a story about a Roman Army legion, and *Apacheria*, which takes place in Tucson in the 1880s.

“My interest in archaeology spurred me to write these

books,” Altimari said. “I enjoyed doing the research and including historical facts to help tell the story.”

His interest in archaeology also motivated him to join a group that performs reenactments of historic events of the Old West, such as the Gunfight at the OK Corral and the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

“I love doing that,” Altimari said. “It’s like living a piece of history each time I participate.”

“I attended U.S. Calvary School, where they teach you how to shoot a gun while riding a horse and how to use a saber in battle. Doing it right increases the historical accuracy of the reenactment.”

Altimari and his wife own a horse, Amos, and he enjoys riding him when he has time.

“Moving to Arizona was the best thing we could have done,” Altimari said. “So was joining Local 99. Both have worked out great for us.”

□ Look for the next issue of 99Report for a story about how union-negotiated health benefits helped a member’s son. You’ll also read about a 79 year-old food clerk and Korean War Veteran who has been married for nearly 60 years. ☐