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SEARCH

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Those who didn't know Edsel Dean may have thought he was a photographer by trade.

Notorious for snapping pictures of friends and acquaintances alike, the former mayor of Cartersville always made sure to provide the photographed party with a visual reminder of his meeting with them to commemorate the moment. Over the years, that added up to numerous documented encounters. Though he died last week at the age of 84 at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, the memories Dean shared with so many people still live on in those photographs.

Yes, many may have assumed Dean was a picture-taker and they would, in a sense, be correct. But if one were to take a snapshot of the life of the man from a broader perspective, they would see that his life encompassed much more.

“He just had a real desire to serve the community,” said Kelley Dial, Dean’s daughter, who is a public defense attorney and member of the Cartersville City Schools Board of Education.

According to his obituary, Dean, a 1949 graduate of Cartersville High School, served on the Cartersville City Council for a total of 26 years, 16 of those as mayor pro-tem. Even until the time of his death, he remained an active community member. His activities included the Bartow Board of Health, where he served as chairperson, the Northwest Georgia Regional Development Commission, as a member and past chair, Salvation Army Advisory Board, as a member and past chair, Kiwanis Club, as a member and past president, Retired Men’s Group, as a member, Cartersville Elks Lodge, as a past member and past exalted ruler, Cartersville Optimist Club, as a former member and Cartersville Exchange Club, as a former member. Dean’s community activities were honored in 2004 when he received the Chairman’s Community Award from the Cartersville-Bartow County Chamber of Commerce.

Dial said her father’s extensive dedication to the community spanned a length of time such that he saw and influenced several historical developments in Cartersville.

“A lot of history in Cartersville goes back to time when he was on the council for so long. Things that seem kind of old hat now,” Dial smiled.

“The bridge over the railroad tracks ... that was a huge deal at one point. Anheuser-Busch coming to town. There were a lot changes going on that he helped with.”

David Archer echoed Dials’ thoughts. Archer, also an attorney, worked with Dean for the duration of the 26 years that Dean was a member of the city council. The two met when they were both elected to the city council in 1971, where Archer served for four years. They developed a close working relationship and lasting friendship with one another.

Archer said Dean was instrumental in a number of positive changes made in Cartersville during his service, including the placement of what is now Dellinger Park at its long-standing location and the expansion of the water treatment plant that ultimately influenced the

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decision of Anheuser-Busch to locate one its breweries here.

“He was a unique person in that he was very passionate about Cartersville,” said Archer of his friend. “He was a giver.”

Beyond Dean’s larger accomplishments, Archer spoke to the hospitable side of him. Even those who knew Dean scarcely were welcomed warmly.

“At the family visitation, I was standing behind a lady who works for the police department,” explained Archer, “and she talked about how it was her job for many years to take the agendas to city council members’ homes before the council meetings. And she told how when she would go to Edsel’s house, she would go up and knock on the door. Invariably, he and his wife, Betty Anne, would invite her in and she’d wind up staying 30 minutes and eating cookies.”

Dean was married to Betty Anne, who survives following his death, for nearly 60 years. In his obituary, it was said that Dean referred to their marriage as “an endless honeymoon.”

As for his other love, photography, Dial said her father did not become interested in the activity until around the time she went to college. However, once he did, he made sure that everyone was aware of his newfound hobby.

“Wherever he was, he had that camera with him,” Archer recalled. “I’d see him at lunch, and he would make me stop and he would take a picture of me and whoever I was with. And he would always bring me a copy of it. But he did that with everybody. I bet in that house, there are thousands and thousands of photographs.”

Dial laughed when she revealed that Archer’s speculation was indeed valid.

“We now have a house full of pictures,” she confirmed.

But out of all things to be remembered about Dean, what is the one trait his daughter wants to be most prevalent in people’s minds?

“That he treated everyone just the same,” said Dial, after a quiet moment in thought. “You know, he had very important people that came to the funeral home and he had waitresses from Waffle House. They were all his friends.”

Though many memories of him still live on inside the four corners of each one of an innumerable amount of printed photos, it seems that Edsel Dean's compassion and influence had no discernible frames.

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