

## JERRY WARE: A REMEMBRANCE

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The following is based on excerpts from prior commentary contributions from the TACA Membership and a special edition of the TACA Comments published in February 1994 as a tribute to Jerry Ware. As the years pass along with the continuous flow of persons through our association, those that were privileged know Jerry Ware are becoming fewer and fewer. For those who knew him and those who unfortunately did not, hopefully this brief recitation will give a better view of this most remarkable man.

*Jerry Ware's life is one to rival a Horatio Alger novel. He grew up in Kirbyville, Jasper County, just northeast of Beaumont and graduated high school there in 1971. He attended Lamar University, working in the Jefferson County Maintenance Department at night to pay his way through college, and graduating with his degree in Accounting in 1975. County Auditor Richard P. LeBlanc hired Jerry to work in Accounts Payable. Later, when Richard became County Judge, Lela Widner became County Auditor and Jerry first assistant. Some years later, Lela passed away and Jerry was appointed County Auditor in 1981.*

*He immediately became involved in the Texas Association of County Auditors, paying his dues, becoming President in 1988. Having served on virtually every TACA committee, he also served on numerous Texas Association of Counties boards. He gave his time to countless other local and community organizations as well.*

*Mickey West, TACA President at the time of Jerry's passing, echoed a very familiar sentiment when he said, "Jerry Ware was not only a fellow County Auditor, he was a close friend." Donald Cozad, Jerry's first assistant at the time and who moved on to become the Collin County Auditor, expressed, "He fought hard. He loved life. It was so important to him, and he cherished it." Another friend and fellow auditor, James Wells, Denton County Auditor, noted, "Jerry Ware was a multi-talented individual, and there was at least one thing about him for each person to admire and want to be like."*

*Keith Hawkes, Jefferson County first assistant at the time, recalled being in Austin in the spring of 1993 with him and Jerry complaining of a sore toe. An examination later revealed that he had malignant melanoma and it had spread throughout his lymphatic system. After surgery and experimental treatments, fighting to the end, Jerry passed away, January 31, 1994, at the age of 41.*

*On rare snowy day in Beaumont, this rare individual was laid to rest after being eulogized with an overflowing outpouring of love and respect from those who knew him as a respected and humble public servant and a dear and caring friend.*

When TACA first came to know Jerry back in the 1980's, your first impressions were of his physical presence, about 6 foot 4 and a handsome young man. He was intelligent, personable, well-spoken and very serious about his job. That was just the cover of the book. The heart of an individual, the determination, the character and the soul cannot be seen in a mere glance, it takes time and personal interaction to see these traits. They are usually, individually very subtle but, after a while, the picture comes evidently clear, "This is indeed someone special" and that was Jerry Ware.

As is the case today, county auditors have many issues facing us, but then some of the things we take for granted now were the result of some hard fought battles back then. Foremost among those battles was the legislative changes that untied the auditor's salary from that of the tax-assessor collector and mandated continuing education for county auditors.

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To say the least, the relationship the county auditors had with the county judges and commissioners association, as well as other official associations, was even more strained in previous years than today. With the leadership of Jerry, and many others, this very important piece of legislation brought the county auditors greater respectability and our credibility was established. The association continues to grow, if not in size, in quality and stature.

It was a rewarding and an important part of this TACA Members life that was spent with Jerry and the other officers and directors with whom they served on the board with until they left in 1989. Unfortunately, while this TACA Member was away from county government, Jerry became ill and passed away. His legacy will be, in part, for the major accomplishments as President and as a leader of our association, but equally the legacy will be of his commonality among us all, the friendships he shared, the service he gave and the family he left to carry on.

Reverence was made to a song or poem once that spoke of the dates on a tombstone and that those dates, regardless of how close or far apart they were on a calendar, did not indicate the measure of a person. It was instead the “dash” between the dates that mattered and what that person had achieved after their birth and before their death.

Jerry’s “dash” was shorter than most, but the impact upon the lives of those who knew him and those who never had the opportunity, cannot be measured in years and days, only in value. Jerry was just a mortal, imperfect human like each one of us are and that is who real leaders are-common people doing uncommon good.

One other point about him, and most persons of lasting influence, is his humility. Were Jerry here with us today, he would be totally self-effacing about the award that bears his name, but he also would recognize the true importance of awards and honors.

Yes, awards recognize people of accomplishment, especially for the person for whom the award is named. However the most important part of the award is the example and inspiration it provides to everyone else. Without good role models there would be no more role models. We can never have too many examples of good character and good practice.

When you hear the names- Nobel, Pulitzer, Heisman, Lombardi, Sam Seale, you first think of the ideals, the character, and the symbols of excellence each represents in their relevant fields. You also know that those who are deemed worthy to receive awards named for these individuals must also share these traits of the namesakes. Jerry Ware and the award named for him by the Texas Association of County Auditors, beginning in 1994, certainly is in that elite group.

Jerry was really just a good guy. And because of Jerry, and those like him, we are all better people today. To honor Jerry, regardless of whether or not you are chosen to have your name inscribed on the plaque-emulate his character, learn from his lessons, and have that heart of a servant. Your influence on your peers and associates can be just as important as was his and that is the true value of the Jerry Ware Award.

From all of those who knew Jerry and those who only knew him through his deeds, we say, “Thank you Jerry.”