

The Shep Lauter Story part 2

Last week's *Historically Speaking* article introduced the idea that there may be opportunities for recognizing individuals who have contributed to the history of Oak Ridge that we have not adequately recognized. Examples were cited where we might do a better job in this area.

As is often the case, I received many phone calls regarding this *Historically Speaking* series. Rick Evans called to say how proud he was to see Shep getting recognized. Rick was coach at Oak Ridge High School from 1976 to 1979 and he said, "Shep was his Assistant Coach." Rick stressed how pleased he was to have known and worked with Shep.

Dale Phillips called to let me know that the first use of what is today known as the Midtown Community Center was for Club Fiesta, a club for the Jefferson Junior High School students when this school was located at the present site of Robertsville Middle School. When the new Jefferson High School was built at its present location and Robertsville Junior High School came into existence, Club Fiesta was a gathering place for the Robertsville students.

Dale said they had "everything they needed at Club Fiesta" and that he had a wonderful experience there. He was a bit frustrated that Club Fiesta is seldom recalled. The phone number Dale left connected me to a person who suggested I not call him anymore after I tried twice to reach Dale. So, Dale, please call 482-4224 and give me a phone number where I can reach you...

Now, on with the Shep Lauter story. One person who should be more visibly recognized than just having the gym of the Oak Ridge Civic Center named for him is Shep Lauter. I am grateful to Jack Campbell for helping with this *Historically Speaking* series featuring the history of Shep Lauter. Also in this concluding article there are several individuals who have written their personal memories of Shep, collected by Jack.

Last week's *Historically Speaking* article left off with Jack telling about Shep's involvement with the Wildcat Den and the fact that it really was a victim of its own success. The idea of providing a place where teens could gather was so needed and so well accepted that the crowds grew too large for the facility to accommodate.

Jack continues: "It was realized that this was a temporary solution and that a larger, multi-purpose facility was needed – such as today's Civic Center. So, in 1967 Shep organized a local youth group that helped campaign to get the bond referendum passed for funding of the construction of the Civic Center and library."

"The Civic Center was approved, funded, and built in 1970. In recognition of what Shep had meant to them and to the City, the students who had participated in this effort wanted a room in the Civic Center named for Shep and lobbied for it – presenting their proposal endorsed by over 700 signatures to City Council.

"The proposal was overwhelmingly accepted and the largest room at the new Civic Center became 'The Shep Lauter Room,' as it is today.

"However, some who enjoyed the Wildcat Den at the height of its popularity in the 50's and 60's, believe that some things may have not made the transition from the Den to the Civic Center: the frequent dances, the hanging out with friends, the sense of ownership by the ORHS students and, last but not least, Shep. However, it is doubtful that anyone could have replaced Shep.

"When visiting the Secret City Festival this June, many will enter what is often referred to as the gymnasium at the Civic Center. The official name is The Shep Lauter Room, as the plaque at the door declares.

"Additional Lauter honors

"1966 - Shep Lauter Day was declared by the City of Oak Ridge and celebrated at a special ceremony attended by local city leaders and many friends.

"1972 – Named to Chattanooga Old Timers Club Hall of Fame

"1982 – Received Oak Ridge Rotary Club Vocational Service Award

"1986 - Oak Ridge Sports Hall of Fame

Jack and I agree that it is significant that Shep was among the first group voted in along with Ben Martin, Nick Orlando and Carl Yearwood (for whom Carl Yearwood Park is named).

Finally, Jack included some comments about Shep Lauter that he collected.

"First, here are a few lines that were part of a eulogy at Shep's funeral. I'm not sure of the author:

'At the Den, Shep ruled with an iron hand. If you were out
Of line, he would put you in line..... Shep loved young people.
They had a place in his heart. He didn't just tolerate them,
He was part of them. This was his life and he was happiest
when he was doing it."

"Now for the comments from others:

'I lived in the stone house at Elza Gate (when the construction of Oak Ridge began and was still living there when I graduated from Oak Ridge High School in 1957.)

'My only thoughts of him are of the den itself. I started going there on Fri. & Sat nights when a freshman in 53'. At first, my mother was strong against my going, but she knew I would never hush up, for I was a social person. Finally, I persuaded her to go one Friday night, park outside and just watch the 'awful goings on' that she had imagined.

'After one night, she decided it must just be the place I told her it was, and I got to go regularly. I can see Shep now, sitting in a chair with arms, right smack dab lined up with the doorway looking right at the entrance way, smoking his sweet smelling pipe. People smoked inside back then. Anyway, NO ONE, not ANYONE got past him.

'If you were from out of town, and not known to Shep, he had questions for you, and you probably didn't get in if you didn't have the right answers. He had his "bouncers", too (ha). One, for sure, was ole Sambo Weir. He sat out there in that booth at the main entrance sometimes where we took up money to get in on Friday nights. Shep checked out the cloak room to where there might be a card game or checkers going on.

'One particular young man, I dare not name, would check himself out in that long mirror in that room on the way out, slicking that hair back ,admiring himself. He did love himself (Ha). Shep would check out the dance floor to see if a young man might be holding that gal a little too close. Was it not amazing - not only did you know he cared about you, but he took pretty good care of us, too.

'If he saw you parked outside in a car, you had just best be talking, and that was it. Sometimes, there would be full lights on, pool tables full, some dancing, or a room so full, you could not move after a game.

'I loved the Wild Cat Den and listening to the conversations in that little room. God Bless You Shep Lauter, you had hundreds of children over the years. Amanda (Mrs. Lauter) was a sweetie too.

'Shirley Brannon Evans 57"

'Here is what I remember most about Shep Lauter. I wrote the twice-weekly Teen Talk Topics column for the Oak Ridger during our senior year in 1958-59. Shep Lauter was always the first person I called for news of interest to high schoolers.

'Shep was always patient and thorough when he gave me news of events and activities at the Wildcat Den. Sometimes, he would call me with a news tip about someone who had done something positive, like winning an award or doing something special. He was one of the heroes of our generation!

'Sandra Whitten Plant'"

'My sister, Frances, who was 3 1/2 yr. older and no longer living, had such affection for Shep Lauter as did her friends. Reading the written memories, I realize how much he was admired by young people. And, let's be honest, there weren't all that many adults enamored of teenagers.

'Jane Murray, ORHS class of 1959'"

"'I wish I had a good story about Shep Lauter...I only remember that I had a great deal of respect for him. I went to his baseball school...I remember you there. One of the last times I saw him was around the sixth grade. He ask me, to ask all us kids, to stop playing on the ball field after it had been drug and lined off, for the games at night.

'Kirk Mills, Class of 1959'"

"'I have no pictures or specific memories except that Shep was always there for anyone who needed him.

'Evelyn Owens Jellison, class of 1958'"

"'Gee, there is so much to remember about Shep I don't know where to start. He was an awesome man, always smiling; even with us teenagers around. I loved the den and I loved Shep for being who he was. I was saddened by his passing.

'There will never, ever be another den. I looked forward to after school and weekends, WOW, den time. It was a place of safety for us, IF we let it be. I know Shep kept up with everything that went on inside, as best he could.

'In ending I will just say LOVE LINGERS ON, MEMORIES LAST A LIFETIME. Thank you for including me. I do pay Tribute to Shep...He deserves this honor...

'Barbara Blackwell Neal, class of 1959'"

"'I remember Shep well...He was a father figure to a lot of us. I talked to Shep a lot about thing and he always gave me a sound answer. Shep was Mr. ORHS to the kids back then. Any kid could go to the den and talk to him...May he rest in peace.

'Smoky Slover, class of 1957'"

Thanks Jack for a fine tribute to Shep Lauder.

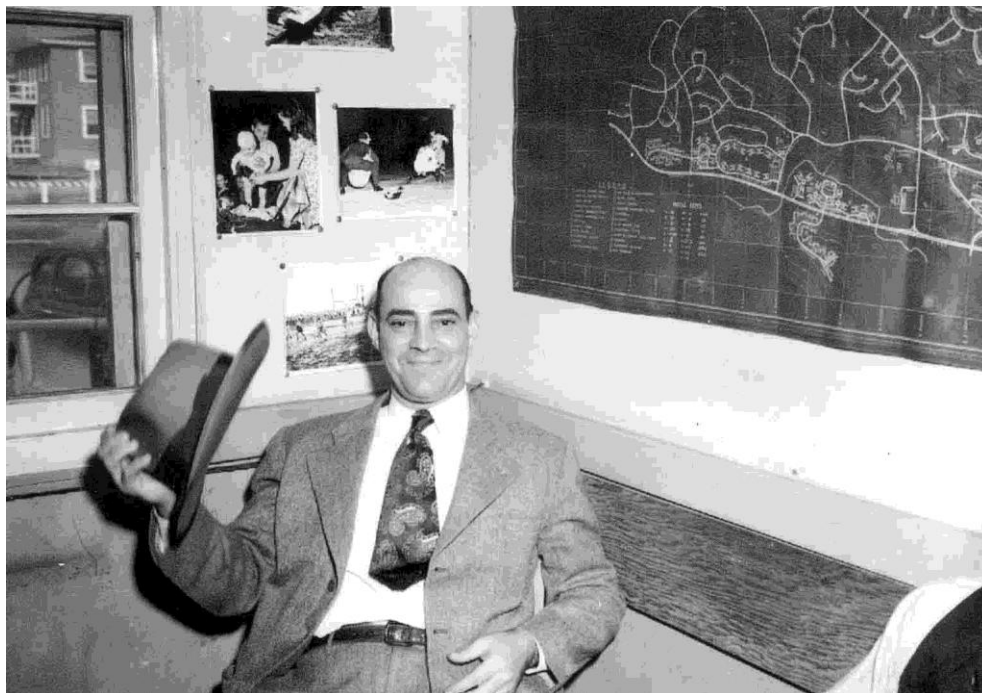


Shep dancing with his wife, Arminda, at the Wildcat Den. Do you know other couples?



DISCUSSING FOOTBALL STRATEGY. Shep Lauter, from the Recreation and Welfare Association, is giving tips to a shirts versus no-shirts touch football game. Shep worked with all ages providing instructions for sports, including sandlot games as well as organized high school competition.

Shep and boys...can you identify any of the young boys?



Shep showing his smiling and jovial attitude