

Man of Many Duties



Some may know him as a small-town farmer. To others, an authority figure. And to some, an agriculture teacher. He has worn many hats in this journey we call life, but regardless of which hat he was wearing at the time, he accompanied it with a warm smile and a welcoming tone.

Jerry Stockton grew up in Tuscola, Texas, on a dry-land cotton farm. He had two sisters and no indoor plumbing, something unfathomable for most.

"We were very poor people," Stockton said, "but we worked hard and I didn't know any different."

Throughout his younger years, Stockton played sports, and showed steers and lambs.

He was a talented athlete, which helped him to achieve his main goal - an education.

Stockton planned to sign a letter of intent to play football for Texas A&M University. After expressing his doubts of becoming an Aggie to his high school Vocational-Agriculture teacher, he found himself standing amongst Texas Tech University football coaches.

His agriculture teacher asked the coaches if they needed any football players. They responded, saying they always need football players. They asked him who he had in mind.

Stockton, standing on-the-spot in front of these men, noticed his name on the chalk board full of potential recruitments.

"I don't know how it got up there," he said, humbled by the fact of the matter.

That very day, he signed a letter of intent to be a Red Raider football player, but not for reasons one might expect.

"In my case, I needed a scholarship because I was poor," Stockton said. "It was a way to go

to school. I like athletics, but always in my mind there was another goal, that was an education."

Stockton dreamed of becoming a veterinarian, but athletics steered him in a different direction. Football practice and afternoon lab classes presented a conflict that was only resolvable by choosing an alternative path, agricultural education.

During his Junior year, Stockton received word his dad had suffered a stroke. He left Texas Tech and returned home to help manage the farm. He said he worked day and night, all while

attending classes at Abilene Christian University. He soon returned to Texas Tech, not to continue his football career, but to complete his degree. Stockton graduated

with a bachelor's degree in agricultural education in 1962.

Soon after graduation, he accepted a job as an agriculture teacher and coach at Plains high school. During his time there he met a girl who he would marry. He saw her at a dance and asked her out. She agreed to go and Stockton said,

"That was my downfall, right there."

After teaching two years in Plains, he became agriculture teacher at Frenship High School. Stockton said he liked high school teaching, because he got to work with students nobody else wanted.

"I could offer them something they couldn't get somewhere else," he said. "There is a certain group that really need your help and I could provide that."

One such case, stood out in his mind. He had a student named John Ford, who was searching for his place in life. Stockton said he felt like he could have a positive influence on him if only he could get him involved. He wanted Ford to participate on the farm skills team and attend leadership contests.

When Stockton spoke with fellow faculty members regarding the idea, they thought it was a waste of time. But he was determined. So he passed out scripts to his students and told them if they were interested in being a part of the skills team, they needed to know the script by Friday. When Friday rolled around, Ford knew his script.

Stockton said he was surprised because he had been unsuccessful in the past with getting Ford to participate. He put Ford on the team, despite his qualified candidacy. The skills team received second in district that year. It was arranged for the team to conduct their demonstration in front of the entire high school.

"He was thrilled to death," Stockton said of John Ford. "It made him feel like a part of a group."

From that day on, he said Ford was an entirely different student. These are the stories which encouraged Stockton that he truly was making a difference.

"There is a place for everyone in FFA," Stockton said.

After his years in teaching, he attained his doctoral degree from Oklahoma State University. He then returned to Texas Tech to serve as an assistant professor. After only three years on faculty, he was appointed to department chair for the College of Agricultural Education.

While he served as department chair, his secretary, Mary Lou Flom, said he was a hard-working, people-oriented person. She said he cared a lot about the students and practiced an open-door policy.

"Everybody really liked him," she said. "Students respected him highly."

Flom said he was laid back and students would frequently come by to visit. She said he was a good teacher and a family man.

She said she remembered a time when Stockton's daughter called his office and said it was an emergency, so Flom got him out of class

in order to accept the phone call. She heard Stockton say,

"You just wait until I get home tonight."

Flom said she wandered what was going on. She later found out Stockton's daughter had rescued a stray cat and her teacher told her she couldn't keep it at school. She had called to ask her dad to save the cat for her, but he did no such thing.

Flom laughed, remembering it as if it were yesterday. She said she was sad to see him go when he accepted a job at Clarendon College

as president in 1989. He served as president there for six years until his retirement in 1995.

Stockton thought he wouldn't like retirement, but he does.

"I tell people, 'I finally found something I am good at - retirement,'" he said with a laugh. "I don't do anything and I don't start that until noon."

During his retirement he has taken up a hobby of restoring old Oliver tractors. At one time he had 50 or 55 tractors in his barn. He spends a lot of time with his son and grandchildren. They are active in showing livestock

and he said he enjoys assisting with their projects.

Dr. Jerry Stockton has traveled many roads over the years and has filled many roles, all of which he did with grace and integrity. At the end of the day, feet up in his recliner, he has the satisfaction of knowing he did all he could to help others succeed. He can proudly hang his hat. 🎩



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