

REGGIE SHANKS PUTNAM COUNTY COMMISSIONER

PUTNAM COUNTY— As the longest serving Putnam County commissioner on record, Reggie Shanks has seen a lot of changes happen in the area through the years.

Now going into his 46th year on the commission, Shanks has always served the sixth district since he was first elected in 1969. Born in 1932, he is the son of the late Walter



“W.R.” Shanks, an owner of a country store in Buffalo Valley for 56 years, and Euda Warren.

He grew up in the Buffalo Valley community, where he still lives to this day.

And what motivated him to run for county commission all those years ago, he said, was for a chance to help people in his district.

“We wanted to have a good county to live in and a good school system,” said Shanks, who served as the county commission chair seven times.

The 82-year-old commissioner started his first term at the age of 37 shortly after the county commission transitioned from the prior county court system of justices of the peace in 20 civil districts, which were based on land districts.

“They used to try cases in their district and things like that. They didn’t used to have session court back years ago,” recalled Shanks. “My daddy had a store in Buffalo Valley, and when the constables made an arrest they’d try them there. And when they wanted to bring them to jail, they’d take them to Cookeville. That’s back in the ‘20s, before I was born.”

According to Shanks, a Tennessee Tech University professor named Richard Wright had a case heard in federal court over the voting population of the districts.

“He won his case because the Buffalo Valley district had two commissioners with two JPs with 90 to 150 people, and Cookeville had four JPs and had 4,000 voters. He won his case, and the judge came and said we have to reapportion.”

The reapportion left the county with 28 commissioners in 14 districts when Shanks was elected. Three years later, the county was reapportioned again to the present 24 commissioners in 12 voting districts. This was after a federal court determined the system was unconstitutional and the county had to be redistricted again to account for population.

Over the decades, Shanks has seen the county grow in leaps and bounds.

“We’ve come a long ways and have one of the best emergency departments and sheriff’s department, we’re modern now... We’re in good shape,” said Shanks, who is known to vote conservatively in the county budget.

“...We’ve got one of the best counties in the state. When I leave here, I want it to be a better place than when I started.”

He wasn’t sure if he would run as commissioner again during the recent county election. But his late wife of 61 years, Andelene Shanks, had asked him if he continue serving on the commission before she passed away a year ago.

“Before she died, she told me, ‘I’m not going to make it, Reggie.’ She said, ‘If I don’t make it, I want you to go ahead and run again.’ Because it would keep me occupied. And I said, well, if I feel like it I will, and so I did.

“...Before I agreed to run, I went to a lot of my friends and supporters in my district and they all said they wanted me to run again,” said Shanks, who has three daughters — Pam Thomas, Gina Hooper and Penny Gilliam. “So I did it, and it turned out I got the best vote I ever got.”

Shanks has not only served the county as an official but also had a long career in local law enforcement of around 35 years, where he worked as a captain, the city’s first detective and as chief deputy sheriff under Sheriff Bill Bilyeu. He joined the Cookeville Police Department at the age of 27 in 1959 after having worked as a farmer.

As an officer, Shanks dealt with all kinds of crime and difficult experiences throughout the years. One memorable moment he recalled is from when he was a member of the Fraternity Order of Police and the group escorted children on a vacation in the early 1960s as part of a community service.

“They had never been to a vacation like that. When they came back home after we took care of them, I never will forget this little boy who got off the bus said, ‘Can I go home with you? I never had milk in my life until I went to the camp.’ I think about that a lot... A lot of people don’t look after their children like they should.”

Despite the difficulties, Shanks is proud of his career as an officer and it was something he enjoyed. He retired from the police department in 1995.

As for his political career, Shanks looks forward to continuing to serve his community through the next four years.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 30 August 2014

REGGIE SHANKS RECOGNIZED FOR 'EXCEPTIONAL' SERVICE

By Jim Herri

A Putnam County commissioner who has been serving for nearly 50 years is being recognized by the Tennessee County Commissioners Association for his tenure.



As part of the program at this year's regional meeting, held in Cookeville Thursday night, time was set aside to present certificates to those commissioners who have 20 or more years of service.

Shanks, who is completing his 48th year, is the fourth longest serving commissioner in the state.

"It's a rare thing for someone to serve that long," said Charles Curtiss, executive director of the TCCA. "They've really got to be doing a great job. You can't fool the public for that long if you're not doing what they want you to do. You've got to be an exceptional individual to be able to serve that long."

"Public service is not easy," said Ben Rodgers, a Putnam County commissioner who also works for the County Technical Assistance Service. "It takes someone with patience, the ability to communicate, and the desire to serve and help those in need."

Rodgers said Shanks represents all of those qualities.

"He has proven so year after year as a Putnam County commissioner. I am thankful for (him) and all that he has done for the county. His pride and love for the county cannot be denied."

Although he has been battling health issues this year, Shanks is known for rarely missing any meeting since he was first elected in 1969. He represents the 6th District on the county commission, an area that was mostly rural when he was first elected, but which now encompasses most of western Cookeville.

In an interview with the Herald-Citizen three years ago, Shanks said the chance to help people is what motivated him to run for office half a century ago.

"We wanted to have a good county to live in and a good school system," he said.

A longtime supporter of the county fair, Shanks is also known for his longstanding opposition to tax increases.

"We must work hard to get the full value of every dollar and keep the property taxes low," he said during one of his campaigns.

Putnam County Executive Randy Porter said that's part of what he likes about Shanks.

"The thing I like the most is his blunt, straightforward honesty, which I try to do myself." Porter said. "I always knew where he stood on any issue. We have not always agreed on everything, but I always respected him and his opinion."

Porter said Shanks' 48 years of service is a record for the county.

"No other commissioner has even come close to that," he said. "I have known Mr. Shanks for 37 of those 48 years and he has not changed a bit. He has always been very conservative, but always willing to stand up for what he believed in."

Porter said the very nature of politics makes the service of Shanks even more unusual.

"His 48 years as a commissioner is somewhat of a miracle in my opinion. With all the controversial issues he had to vote on over those 48 years and to still carry his district every election is amazing," he said. "I don't think we will ever see his record broken."

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 22 September 2017

COMMUNITY MOURNS LONGTIME COMMISSIONER

By Jim Herri

As the regular monthly meeting of the Putnam County Commission began Monday night, one seat was empty.

Health issues had once again kept Reggie Shanks, a commissioner from the 6th District, from attending the meeting of the body he had been a member of for nearly half a century.

But Commission Chairman Mike Atwood announced as the meeting began that Shanks was, in fact, participating remotely through a smartphone livestream.

"In essence, he's really not absent," said Atwood. "The folks (with the livestream camera) are giving him the opportunity to be a part of our meeting tonight. We'll try not to disappoint you, Commissioner Shanks."

The relatively routine session would be the last one that Shanks was able to watch. He died Tuesday, but friends said his final request to be part of the commission proceedings, even from a distance, speaks to his dedication.

"I loved Reggie Shanks and he was one of my mentors and one of my heroes," said fellow commissioner Danny Holmes. "I go way back when Reggie was a police officer for the city of Cookeville and he taught me how to treat people with respect. He always told me to show respect and you will receive respect back."

Shanks' daughter, Gina Hooper, also recalled his time with the police department.

"Daddy retired from the Cookeville Police force after 35 years," she said on Facebook.

"He started working in 1960, in a time when he got paid \$200 per month. He worked 12 hours a day and six days a week, and more when they had to work ballgames. They had three police cars and only one patrolman on duty at a time."

Hooper said her father's dedication to the job came from an underlying desire to help people.

"He taught me the value in loving people with my heart and always trying to see the good in people first," she said. "He always told me when you are good to people they will be good to you."

Shanks was first elected to the county commission in 1969 and had been continuously reelected since then, making him the longest serving member in the county and one of the longest serving commissioners in the state of Tennessee. He was also a long time supporter of the Putnam County fair.

"Daddy loved the fair and missed it so much this year," Hooper said. "This is the first year he has missed going to the fair in over 79 years."

Services for Shanks will be held at the fairgrounds at 3 p.m. Friday.

"He was very passionate about our county fair," said County Executive Randy Porter.

"He has spent hundreds of hours there over the years, some of those as a commissioner and many as a member of the fair board. It's only fitting that his family chose to have his funeral at the fairgrounds."

Holmes praised Shanks' work ethic.

"He was honest, hardworking and treated everyone fairly," Holmes said. "When I came on the commission in 2014, it was an honor to serve with Reggie Shanks. I often would tell him I am voting like you tonight so I can be a long time county commissioner. He would chuckle and say, 'just vote your heart, Danny.' He was a great man that the community will never replace. I lost a great friend and the county lost a great commissioner."

Atwood agreed.

"Putnam County lost a dedicated soldier," he said.

"Daddy had such a special life and has touched so many people," Hooper said.

"Everywhere I go I meet people who tell me stories of daddy and how he touched their lives."

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 18 October 2017

*Read more history of Putnam Co., TN & surrounding areas at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>