

## Big R -- big heart

My remarkable Lampasan this month is Richard Williams, sometimes known as "Big R."

If judged by writer Ralph Waldo Emerson's standards, Richard has had a successful life: "To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded."

Richard's life began in Elsa, in the Rio Grande Valley, in 1934. His dad, a farmer, also owned a gas station during World War II. Some of Richard's earliest memories are of hoeing cotton, milking cows and checking the air in tires. During the war days of rationing, some people had their tires checked every day to make them last longer.

He also remembers sitting around the dining table at night with his family, pasting gas ration stickers in books that had to be submitted to the government in order for his dad to purchase more gasoline.

His parents both loved to cook, so the four boys were well fed. Richard was the tallest and quickly grew to 6 feet 4 inches. His brothers were all over six feet, easily surpassing their parents' heights.

Religion has played an important part in Richard's life. The Presbyterian Church was the only one in Elsa, so everyone went there -- at least, Richard did until he got his driver's license, and then he went to whichever church had the prettiest girls, he said.

When Richard's brother was born 13 years his junior, he was seriously involved with his rearing, and they have remained close. He feels proud that his brother has experienced success as a vocational agriculture teacher and fortunate that he is still living, because the others have died.

The happiest days in Richard's life, he said, were when his own children were born. But first let me tell you about the love of his life.

Richard and Nancy met in 1952 while attending Edcouch-Elsa High School. Nancy was the prettiest girl in the junior class when he was a senior. They married in 1954 shortly after they graduated. Son Rick was born in 1955, Michael in 1957, and Melanie in 1960.

Richard worked for two years with Central Power and Light, then when the opportunity came he entered the Texas Department of Public Safety Academy and became a state trooper. The job provided good pay and great security, and gave him a chance to help young people.

Richard served as a trooper in Harlingen, Westlaco, San Antonio and La Marque before arriving in Lampasas in 1965.

Longtime residents tell me Richard was known as a caring trooper. He was concerned about lawbreakers and made an effort to understand their circumstances.

One woman recalls that he once stopped her for exceeding the speed limit. Because her station wagon was loaded with children, Richard pointed out that her tires were thin and she could have killed her children. It was a lesson she never forgot.

I also was told that when Richard jailed a man, he often took food to his family if he suspected they were in need. He was the trooper with the big presence and the big heart.

Richard told me that once during his trooper days in Lampasas, two flashily dressed young women spent most of the morning walking up and down Key Avenue. After several hours of observing them, he stopped to inquire if they needed help and found out they were from California, their car had broken down, and their male companions had gone to Austin to get auto parts. He invited them home with him.

They ended up playing with his children and stayed to eat, bathe and spend the night before they were on their way.

As a trooper, Richard knew lots of townspeople. This gave him an excellent opportunity to know about kids who needed help.

In 1976, he took his first group of youngsters to His Hill, a Christian summer camp in Comfort.

The Guadalupe River flowed through the camp where there was canoeing, archery, a swimming pool, hiking trail, chapel, cabins and a counselor for every six children.

Each day there were games and worship services in the chapel where campers learned praise songs, how to pray and about the Bible. The kids liked the camp so much there was frequent crying when they had to return home, he said.

A few years later, Richard

### Remarkable Lampasans Bobbye Alexander Behlau



**Richard Williams, a former Texas Department of Public Safety trooper, has always had a soft spot for the community's youth -- and they have one for him.**

started "His Kids" (meaning God's kids), which met weekly in Lampasas, first in a warehouse where he installed a basketball hoop and ping pong table and served the kids hot dogs and cola.

By this time, Richard had transferred to the Department of Public Safety Motor Vehicle Inspection. His work involved checking civilian inspection stations in nine counties, which freed him on weekends to spend more time with His Kids.

Big R's youth club grew. He included Bible verses and Christian teachings in his recreational meetings. He taught kids the praise hymns he'd learned at the Comfort camp. Most of the children had never been inside a church, so he didn't have structured church services.

While Christianity was the ultimate goal, Richard did not push it. He just wanted to teach the kids

how to have a better life.

Many of the youth knew little about personal hygiene. For one group, Williams had "pretty parties" and persuaded Lampasas beauticians to come and instruct them.

Big R wants everyone to know he didn't launch His Kids alone. He had help from the Texas State Troopers Association, which provided cash and transportation to camp, Six Flags, Schlitterbahn and the Belton Water Park.

Many individuals in Lampasas and Lometa have helped him. One who came to his mind readily is Harrell Clary, former president of the Lampasas ISD Board of Trustees, who loaned his ranch for fishing, camping and cookouts.

Then in 1996, it was time for Richard to retire. The Trooper Newsletter wrote: "He had served his state well. He and his wife Nancy had raised two sons and a daughter, mostly in Lampasas, and they were grown. But what to do about His Kids -- the struggling youth of Lampasas and Lometa?"

Then Big R thought of the years when he worked nights and weekends with kids and left Nancy home alone. "He needed to make it up to her," the newsletter continued. "They needed a change. He said his goodbyes. With many of His Kids, it was with many hugs and tears. He didn't know it, but he was leaving a huge legacy for some -- a new life for others."

Richard and Nancy sold their property at Nix and began traveling, mostly to states out west. They stayed awhile in New Mexico, then came back to Leakey and settled for two years on Richard's brother's ranch. Their longest stay was at Fort Craig, N.M., where they lived in their travel trailer and were volunteers for three years for The Bureau of Land Management and acted as guides at the fort.

Richard said that was living in isolation because they were 50 miles away from the nearest town of Truth or Consequences.

In 1996, Big R had a mild heart attack and ended up with a pacemaker. The experience made them want to move back to Lampasas, closer to their children.

They settled here for the second time in February 2008, after having been away for 10 years.

The night they returned to Lampasas, Nancy was taken to the hospital for emergency treatment, and she has battled health problems ever since. They are convinced coming home was the right



**Big R works closely with adult volunteers -- former His Kids participants -- and other youth in the community.**

thing. It didn't take long for Richard to reconnect with kids, so phase two of His Kids was born in 2008. Kids from the earlier phase were grown up and stepped forth to help him. Among them were Mario Moreno, Nancy Lopez, Christy Ford and Misty Pierino.

His first thrust was to take youth back to His Hill Christian Camp in Comfort.

Then Richard and his assistants established weekly meetings in Lampasas. First, they met in a park during the summer for "fun rallies" that included games, pizza and a brief spiritual talk by Big R.

Often, Lampasas musician Jarrett Schaub -- who happens to be Richard's grandson -- would play popular and spiritual music during meal time.

In late 2009, Richard and his assistants looked for an indoor place to meet. A Lampasas woman who had read about their activities in The Troopers Newspaper mentioned His Kids to the minister of Grace Fellowship.

Paul Kenley was so impressed he offered the church's youth activity building for their Monday night meetings.

Sometimes on Sundays, His Kids attend the Church of Christ at Pearl. The congregation of mostly older people have taken these kids into their hearts and often invite them into their homes.

I attended one of the His Kids meetings and found about 20 kids of mixed ages, some younger than 8, which is the suggested enroll-

ment age. The leaders couldn't refuse the request of a couple of 6-year-olds who wanted to attend. Richard told a Bible story to a rapt audience of teenagers while his assistants instructed the younger children.

I was there long enough to see refreshments delivered by the women of Grace Fellowship, as is their custom on Monday nights.

Readers may react as I did to Richard's story -- amazed at his efforts and wanting to help. He advised me that if I could give \$50, one camper would be able to spend a week at His Hill Camp. Donations may be sent to P.O. Box 1323, Lampasas, TX 76550.

Another suggestion from Richard to those who want to help struggling youth and their families in Lampasas: Volunteers are always welcome. Show up Monday at 6 p.m. at Grace Fellowship, or call Richard at (830) 613-1619.

And if you can't help this group, start your own "His Kids" by befriending one kid or family. "The rewards are great," to quote Big R.

*Bobbye Alexander Behlau was born in Lampasas and graduated from LHS in 1946. After living in San Antonio for 50 years where she was a school principal, she and her husband, Joe, have retired in Lampasas. Recently, a new school in Northside ISD in San Antonio was named for her.*

*She is a descendant of the Alexanders and the Davises who settled here in the 1800s. She can be reached at 556-4076 or at beh1323@sbcglobal.net.*

## CattleWomen donate books, host readings

Colorado River CattleWomen will host four readings for children of all ages during February at the Lampasas Public Library.

The local organization will donate books for children about beef and cattle to the library, with the readings to be from those books.

The readings -- from 10:30-11:15 a.m. -- are in conjunction with the "I Heart Beef" campaign.

Along with the readings, Colorado River CattleWomen will have the Texas Beef Council booth and beef information and handouts.

The "I Heart Beef" program is designed to help drive demand for beef middle meats "by elevating consumers' passion for great steaks like the T-bone and tenderloin," said Karli Freeman with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"A secondary emphasis is to help

generate more awareness that lean beef is good for your heart, especially in light of February being Heart Health Month." The month also has been designated as Beef Lover's Month.

For more information, please contact Molly Lesley, Colorado River CattleWomen president, at 525-5201 or cattlwomen@gmail.com. In addition, more information is available at txbeef.org.

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Lampasas County Conservative Club is Hosting a **Non-Partisan Political Forum** at the Lampasas County Courthouse **Thursday, February 11** 6:30 p.m. — Ask Questions 7:00 p.m. — Forum **Public is Invited** Refreshments After



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## We Support our Granddad and Dad



## VOTE JACK B. COX

### County Commissioner, Pct. 4 Republican

Jack B. and Terri Cox have seven children and 14 grandchildren, including a son, Ryan Evans, who is on his second tour with the U.S. Air Force in Afghanistan.

- Jack is a full-time commissioner with no other business activity. He is available to all citizens 24-7.
- He is the most conservative member of the Commissioners Court.
- Jack is a life member of Adamsville Presbyterian Church.
- He is an honest man with strong family values.
- "I'll vote 'No' on any tax rate increase."

Early Voting Feb. 16 • Republican Primary March 2

Pol. adv. pd. for by Jack B. Cox, Kristin Evans, treasurer, P.O. Box 1004, Lampasas, TX 76550