

Isham, Robert O. | 1939-2012

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Robert O. Isham

Visionary. Mentor. Encourager. Leader. Worker. Patriarch.

Those are just a few of the words people in Decatur use to describe Robert O. Isham, who died Saturday, July 28, at the age of 73 after a brief illness.

Isham moved in many circles and touched the lives of thousands of people with quiet leadership, integrity and a determination to do things the right way. The longtime Decatur resident was a successful businessman and real estate investor who helped lead both the library and the hospital through major expansions.

He was a member of the Decatur Church of Christ for 37 years and served as an elder for 28 years. He served as a trustee of Abilene Christian University from 1985 to 1995.

Library board President Betty Carson described Isham as a “man of principle” who “lived what he believed.” “You could take his word to the bank,” she said. “He was just a genuinely good man. Whatever he did, he gave it 100 percent. If he was on a board, he was not just there because somebody asked him to be – he was a contributing member, and he functioned that way as long as he was on the board. “He didn’t force his issues on anybody, but once he decided on something, he was good to go.”

Isham was president of the library board in 1989 when the new facility opened, and he played a key role in the community’s fundraising efforts to match a grant from John and Katherine Jackson.

Isham’s legendary love of reading and of his state led him to build a library at his home with an extensive collection of Texas historical books. But the community’s hospital was also near to his heart.

Isham joined the board of directors of Wise Regional Health System in 1989 and was president of the board for a dozen years before stepping down in 2007. It was under his leadership that the hospital built its current facility, which opened in 2006.

“He was such an instrumental part in our entire growth spurt between ’95 and the time he left the board. He was

a major component,” said Steve Summers, chief executive officer of WRHS since 1991. “Robert had a vision for us.”

That vision, which Summers said was “pretty much established” in the 1990s, was to be the best hospital between the Metroplex and Wichita Falls, on to Abilene.

“He wanted us to be the best facility in that entire region,” Summers said. “We’ve actually met that and by many counts are as good as the hospitals you’ll see in the Metroplex. He got us to where we are today by his vision and his faith.”

Summers also used the word “steadfastness” when speaking of the longtime board president.

“He leaves so many legacies in business, church and family,” he said. “His skills on the board were bringing the vision and then working – helping to create the plan to put this whole facility in place, and having faith in the folks here at the hospital to accomplish the task.

“When people take a look at this facility they ought to be thinking about Robert.”

Summers said Isham was “really a low-key guy” who did not seek the spotlight.

“He would get up and speak if called upon, and he would do a wonderful job, but I don’t think that was what he really enjoyed,” Summers said. “He was very unassuming, but when he put his mind to something, that’s where it went.”

His leadership had a major impact on his church as well.

Mike McDowell, pastoral minister at Decatur Church of Christ, said Isham was “a man of wisdom, great vision and had a gift of leadership and mentoring that has impacted many, many lives.”

McDowell, who also serves as an elder for the church, was encouraged to take on that role by Isham, who had just stepped down after nearly three decades.

“I had a lot of conversations with Robert,” McDowell said. “He was one of those guys you could just listen to forever. He had such insight into God’s word, and he could really build you up and encourage you. It wasn’t just in this local congregation – it was in the community. He loved the Lord, and he used the gifts he had been blessed with to bless others.

“It almost feels like you’ve lost a patriarch.”

Services were held at 2 p.m. Tuesday at the church with Rick Ross and Everett Chambers officiating. Interment was at Oaklawn Cemetery.

Pallbearers were Cody Duncum, Casey Duncum, Cade Isham, Dennis Lee, Calvin Buchanan, Jeff Jones, Raul Chavarria and Mike Casey.

Isham was born Feb. 6, 1939, in Overton, to Odis and Hazel (Turner) Isham. He received his bachelor’s degree in accounting at Arlington State College, now the University of Texas at Arlington. He married Jeanne Sue Hopper on Aug. 20, 1960 in Arlington.

Isham was a longtime member of the Texas State Historical Society and the Texas Society of Public Accountants.

Survivors include his wife of 51 years; daughter Angela Duncum and husband, Mark, of Decatur; sons David Isham and wife, Karen, of Decatur and Mark Isham and wife, Joy, of Fort Worth; grandchildren Cody Duncum and wife, Christina, Casey Duncum and Cade, Jaci, Katie and Gracie Isham; brothers William and Royce Isham; numerous nieces and nephews.

Robert was preceded in death by a grandson, Clinton Duncum.

Memorials can be made to the Decatur Church of Christ Mission Fund.