

## **Lou Vee Bridges | 1928-2014**

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Lou Vee Bridges may have impacted more lives in Wise County than anyone you've never heard of.

Bridges, 85, who died Sunday, May 25, 2014, in Decatur, was a board member of Wise County Water Control & Improvement District No. 1, and secretary-treasurer of the National Watershed Coalition (NWC), based in Chandler, Okla.

A Paradise resident, she worked tirelessly for the creation of flood-control structures throughout the county to protect farmland, roads and lives during catastrophic flooding.

"Most people didn't realize what all she did," said Precinct 2 Commissioner Kevin Burns, immediate past-chairman of the National Watershed Coalition.

"Wise County's system of dams, the protection of landowners' rights, property, farmland – that is Lou Vee's legacy. I was very fortunate to get acquainted with her, fortunate she let me know what was going on."

Lou was born June 21, 1928, in Boyd to William and Annie (Albritton) Bridges. She married Bob Randall Pruden, who preceded her in death. She was a member of the Paradise Methodist Church.

As an administrative assistant for the U.S. and European divisions of General Electric, Bridges was legendary for her ability to motivate people and get things done.

Dr. Dan Sebert, executive director of the NWC, gave the eulogy at her service, which was Thursday at Hawkins Funeral Home Chapel in Bridgeport.

"She took a lot of people by surprise, and she knew that," he said. "It was part of her method. People would think they were stopping to meet a sweet little lady, and when they left they'd have a sore arm from it being twisted, and a list of things they needed to do – things they were afraid not to do because they promised that sweet little lady they would."

Burns said her work with GE was in the rocket propulsion division for the space program.

“She had a lot of office and supervisory experience,” he said. “She was really something.”

Her involvement with water projects started when she helped shelve a Corps of Engineers project near Boyd in the 1980s. The idea was to build a big flood-control dam that could have inundated 45,000 acres of farmland during a heavy rain.

“It would have taken out most of the farmland between Lake Bridgeport and Boyd,” Burns said.

Instead, there are now 108 flood-control structures throughout the county, most of them with 3 to 5 acres of coverage that would swell to 12 to 15 acres at flood stage.

“It’s a simple system, but it works well to prevent our roads from washing out,” Burns said. “Lou Vee really had a lot to do with that. She made my job easier as a commissioner, because these structures protect my roads so well. They protect roads, lots of farmland and lots of lives during significant rains.”

Bridges worked closely with former U.S. Congressman Charlie Stenholm, but she was fearless about approaching anyone who could help Wise County.

“Lou Vee has affected state budgets, congressional budgets and executive branch budgets for years – and all for our benefit,” Burns said. “She was very active in the political arena in that way.

“She was very passionate about it,” he added. “It was impressive to watch her work.”

Sebert said she was still active in the NWC when she died.

“People would ask me how long she was going to serve in that office, and my answer was, ‘As long as she wants to.’” he said. “She still had hotel reservations and travel plans when she died, and she expected to be able to do those things.

“She had a lot of energy for a woman her age – and she had a lot of friends who helped her get where she needed to be to make good things happen for Wise County.”

He said it’s due in large part to her efforts that Wise County is his “poster child” for interagency cooperation as he travels the nation promoting soil and water conservation.

“The things that have gone on in Wise County, the cooperation among the county, the Soil & Water Conservation District, the Water Board, the Water Control & Improvement District and other organizations – that’s her legacy,” he said. “She’d get people by the ear and help them find the right path to do the right thing, and they appreciated it.”

Rev. Gary Sessions officiated the service, and Gary Potts, Mike Overton, James McGilvray, Dickie Clement, Darnel Willis, Cody Gillispie, Burns and Paul Wood served as pallbearers. Burial was in Paradise Cemetery.

Bridges is survived by members of her extended family, and numerous friends.

Donations may be made to Wise County Animal Shelter or the charity of your choice.