



HALL OF HONOR  
• 1990 •

## Tribute to WILLARD WARREN SCHUESSLER, M.D.

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*by Gordon L. Black, M.D.*

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**F**OR THE THIRTIETH TIME, THE MEMBERS OF THE El Paso County Historical Society gather to inscribe upon its Hall of Honor the names of two El Pasoans. Our living honoree this year is Dr. Willard Warren Schuessler, a well-known plastic and maxillofacial surgeon and prominent El Paso civic leader.

Dr. Schuessler is from pioneer-Texan background, but he was born in Chicago while his teacher-father was working toward an advanced degree at Northwestern University. On the family's return to Dallas, young Willard began his educational pursuits. By the time he was a student at Southern Methodist University, he had already exhibited leadership and was elected president of his freshman class. At Baylor University School of Medicine he was selected as a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, the national honorary medical fraternity. Membership is accorded in recognition of outstanding academic achievement and is the highest award given by medical schools to their students. He was further honored at the time of his graduation by being the recipient of the Surgeon General's award

as the outstanding student of his medical-school class.

Dr. Schuessler remained with the Baylor University Hospital System for his internship and surgical residency. Following this, he spent four years in training under Dr. James Mills, Dallas' first plastic surgeon.

Part of the arrangement was that Dr. Schuessler would do all the night work. Therefore it was he who responded to a call regarding a victim of an automobile accident who had a badly injured nose. The nose in question belonged to a Southern Methodist University graduate who was also a beautiful model. She was accompanied by a very concerned mother. When Dr. Schuessler showed up on the scene, the mother rather testily told him that the plastic surgeon had already been called. Dr. Schuessler replied, "I am the plastic surgeon." The mother's reply: "You don't look old enough even to be an intern." But to Louise, the patient, the surgeon's youthfulness didn't seem to be a problem. During the weeks that followed, Dr. Schuessler's interest became something more than the usual physician-patient relationship, and by the time of her last scheduled visit, Dr. Schuessler mentioned some tickets that he had to a dance at the beautiful Adolphus Hotel ballroom. However he added that any girl who went with him to the dance would probably have to go home in a taxi. "Well, what's wrong with that?" replied Louise. In November of this year, Willard and Louise Schuessler will celebrate fifty years of marriage. On hand for the festivities will be their three children and their two grandchildren.

Dr. Schuessler's military career began just one week following his marriage to Louise. He was called into active service for one year to head up the Plastic Surgery Service at Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio. He later became Chief of Plastic surgery at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D. C., before he came to William Beaumont Medical Center as Chief of Plastic and Maxillofacial Surgery in 1944. When he left the Army in 1946 as a colonel, the one year for which he had originally been called had stretched into six years.

Dr. Schuessler's military experience in World War II was obviously quite satisfying because he continued to be involved with the military. He remained a consultant at William Beaumont Army Hospital for twelve years, and was a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army. For these and many other services, he has received at least ten major awards including the Patriotic Service Award, bestowed by the Secretary of the Army.

In reviewing Dr. Schuessler's many activities, I have come to the

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WILLARD WARREN SCHUESSLER, M.D.  
(Photograph by Elson-Alexandre  
Los Angeles, California Chicago/Honolulu/Tokyo)



conclusion that as a little boy, Willard probably really wanted to be a policeman. He has been an active member of at least seven groups related to law enforcement—including being an honorary Texas Ranger, a United States Deputy Marshal, and an officer of Crime Stoppers (this latter position being one he still holds).

Among the people I have talked to about Dr. Schuessler is John Phelan, longtime El Paso radio and television personality. John came as a patient to William Beaumont Army Hospital because he had been severely burned in Germany during World War II. Multiple surgical procedures requiring several months were necessary; and he and Dr. Schuessler became warm friends. John credits Dr. Schuessler with having been a significant factor in his life not only because of the successful surgery, but also because Willard encouraged him to get out into the community and go to college. John started off with a course in radio at Texas Western College of Mines and Metallurgy, and Willard let John use his dictaphone to practice "broadcasting." Then Willard critiqued the young man's technique. Before long John was working as night man at KTSM radio station.

One night, John included in his broadcast the announcement of Dr. Willard Schuessler's change from military to civilian status and that he was about to begin his practice in El Paso. Because of his gratitude and friendship, John spoke of Dr. Schuessler's outstanding surgical skills and encouraged everyone to support him in his new practice.

This was at a time when organized medicine took a very dim view of anything that even sounded like advertising and, of course, this did sound very much like advertising. The fathers of the El Paso County Medical Society were still pondering Willard's suitability for membership when some of Willard's friends gave the Schuesslers a party to celebrate their entrance into civilian life. The high point of the festivity was the release of a large number of helium-filled balloons. This was done with great fanfare, and only after the balloons were gaily floating skyward was Willard told that each balloon contained a coupon which entitled the bearer to one free facelift. This may not have been a factor, but we do know that Dr. Schuessler never did facelifts or any other type of cosmetic surgery.

In spite of all this "help," Willard was accepted into membership in the Medical Society, which he later served as its president. In 1985, the Medical Society instituted the S. T. Turner award, which is patterned after the Historical Society Hall of Honor. One deceased physician and one living physician are chosen annually to receive this award, the Society's highest honor. And who was the first living recipient of this award? Dr.

Willard W. Schuessler, of course.

His many activities in organized medicine included being Chief of Staff at Southwestern General Hospital. He has served also on the staff of twelve other Texas hospitals, including the Texas Crippled Children's Hospital; and he was cited by New Mexico Governor Garry E. Carruthers for his outstanding contributions to the crippled children of New Mexico. Further, Dr. Schuessler served twice as the president of District One Medical Society of the Texas Medical Association, and he was president of the Southwestern Medical Association and a founding member of the Southwest Surgical Society.

Dr. Schuessler's interests have not been confined to medicine. He has actively participated in community affairs. He was elected and served with distinction as Alderman of the City of El Paso. He has served on many committees devoted to improving the quality of life for the citizens of El Paso. As an example, he and René Mascareñas, a civic leader and industrialist in Juárez, formed the Inter-City Group composed of civic and business leaders of Juárez and El Paso. This group quietly oils the troubled waters to prevent small irritations from becoming large problems. The Cordova Bridge, as an example, could never have been built but for the work of this group. Dr. Schuessler has also been involved in the Rotary Club of El Paso, the Army YMCA, the Border Patrol Museum and Library, the El Paso Aviation Hall of Fame, and the Del Norte Club. Further, he has served as president of the Sun Carnival Association and as president of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce.

During his presidency of the Chamber of Commerce, his wife chaired the Woman's Department of the Chamber. The Schuesslers had been in El Paso only a few years, but already Louise had become fascinated with the history of the region. She decided that her project would be to establish an organization to preserve that history. This organization is now called the El Paso County Historical Society. In 1979, Louise was inducted into the Society's Hall of Honor; and now, with Willard's induction, they are the only couple to have been so honored.

Dr. Schuessler's contributions have not gone unnoticed or unrecognized. Among the many honors he has received for community service are the Conquistador Award, the highest award given by the City of El Paso, and the El Paso Chamber of Commerce Award of Merit. Recently he was honored by El Paso Senior Opportunities and Services as a recipient of the Mentor of Today Award. In 1956, when he was really just beginning his pursuit of service to others, Southern Methodist University conferred upon him its Outstanding Alumnus Award. He has also been honored as

recipient of the Humanitarian Award of the National Jewish Hospital and Research Center in Denver.

The Historical Society's charge to the Selection Committee is to choose for induction into its Hall of Honor "Outstanding Men and Women of character, vision, courage, and creative spirit...who have made El Paso County better for their having lived in it...and who...by their singular achievements have brought honor and recognition to the El Paso community." A most welcome and deserving addition to the prestigious list of names which grace the El Paso County Historical Society Hall of Honor is that of Dr. Willard Warren Schuessler. ☆

### HALL OF HONOR THE EL PASO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1961	James Wiley Magoffin Lawrence Milton Lawson	1976	Mrs. Otto Norwald Fred Hervey
1962	Richard Fenner Burges Maud Durlin Sullivan Rev. B. M. G. Williams	1977	Cleofas Calleros Msgr. Henry Buchanan
1963	Eugenia Schuster Robert Ewing Thomason	1978	Robert R. Jones Edward W. Rheinheimer, M.D.
1964	Allen H. Hughey, Sr. Mrs. W. D. Howe	1979	Thornton Hardie Louise Johnson Schuessler
1965	Ernest Ulrich Krause Lucinda de Leftwich Templin	1980	Henry Thomas Ponsford J. M. Hanks
1966	Charles Robert Morehead Maurice Schwartz	1981	Henry C. Trost Abraham Chavez, Jr.
1967	Robert E. McKee Chris P. Fox	1982	William M. Yandell, M.D. Margaret Schuster Meyer
1968	Zachariah T. White Jack Caruthers Vowell	1983	Felix Martinez Elizabeth Hooks Kelly
1969	James Augustus Smith Jean Carl Hertzog	1984	Brigadier Gen. Anson Mills Manuel Gregorio Acosta
1970	Haymon Krupp Eugene O. Porter	1985	William H. Burges William I. Latham
1971	Hugh Spotswood White Charles Leland Sonnichsen	1986	Mrs. Guy Hallett Johnson Karl O. Wylter
1972	Olga Bernstein Kohlberg Joseph F. Friedkin	1987	Dorrance D. Roderick Gertrude Goodman
1973	Juan Siqueiros Hart Judson F. Williams	1988	Jeanie M. Frank Thomas J. Beall Millard G. McKinney
1974	Joseph Magoffin José Cisneros	1989	Brigadier Gen. S.L.A. Marshall D. Harold Wiggs, Sr.
1975	James Price Hague Tom Lea	1990	William Henry Fryer Willard W. Schuessler, M.D.