

J.M. Hanks, Ysleta school patriarch, dead at 87

By Ramon Renteria
El Paso Times



El Paso Times

J.M. Hanks, who spent a half century shaping the Ysleta Independent School District from three rural schools into the state's seventh-largest school system, died Sunday in Palestine, Texas. He was 87.

Hanks was considered an El Paso institution: a compassionate educator who at retirement in 1980 had served as superintendent of the same school district for more than 50 years.

"You'd be hard-pressed to come up with anyone to equal his abilities," said Algie Felder, who served on the Ysleta school board in the waning years of the Hanks administration. "He was just one of a kind."

J.M. Hanks built Ysleta into Texas' seventh-largest school district.

Former colleagues describe Hanks as an even-handed mediator and a financial wizard who master-minded the district's expansion but felt more at ease letting subordinates take the credit.

Noted for introducing innovation, Hanks established a bilingual education pro-

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Hanks

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gram in Ysleta schools in 1948. He also built schools on the East Side — a step ahead of dramatic post-World War II growth.

Hanks also led a national campaign convincing the federal government to give special aid to school districts to educate children living on federal installations.

"We're going to miss a fine friend," said Mary Peatschman, principal at Sageland Elementary. She described Hanks as an unselfish leader more inclined in surplus money years to give teachers a pay raise than pad his own salary.

Ascarate Elementary Principal Nellie Morales remembers Hanks as a friend and mentor.

"He had a way of controlling the forces, a calming effect over people," Morales said.

Harris Cantrell, a central office administrator, said: "His every thought was for the

betterment of the district. He had a very sharp mind."

In 1979, the district by popular demand named J.M. Hanks High School in Hanks' honor while he was still superintendent. The East El Paso high school was the first in the district named after a person.

In 1926, he came to Ysleta — then three schools and 2,000 students — as a teacher and basketball coach. A year later, he became Ysleta High School principal. And two years later — the beginnings of the Great Depression — he became superintendent at age 28.

He took a three-year break during World War II to serve in the U.S. Army Air Corps.

When Hanks retired, the district was seventh-largest in Texas with 44 schools and more than 43,000 students.

Hanks had been in failing health for several months before his death. He was writing a book, tracing the district's history.

Funeral is at 3 p.m. today in Palestine, Hanks' hometown. An El Paso memorial service is planned at a future date.

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HANKS

DR. J. M. HANKS, Funeral services of Dr. J.M. Hanks, of Oakwood, TX will be held Tuesday at 3 PM in Bailey & Foster Chapel with the Rev. William Newman officiating. Burial will be in the Oakwood City Cemetery.

Mr. Hanks was born October 8, 1901 in the Bradford Community of Anderson County, TX. A son of the late Jesse Parmer Hanks and Maggie Holloway Hanks. Died Sunday at 7:40 PM in Memorial Hospital. During WWII he served as a Major in the US Air Force. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church of El Paso, a member and first president of the El Paso Lions Club, the El Paso Masonic Lodge, and a honorary member of the Knife and Fork Club. Dr. Hanks was a graduate of Southwest Texas State at San Marcos and received his Doctorate at New Mexico State University. He talked in the Springfield Schools, served as a teacher and principal at Swanson Hill and for 50 years served as superintendent of the Ysleta Schools.

Survivors wife Robbie Holloway Hanks, of Oakwood, numerous nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers Troy Hanks, Morris Hanks, J.C. Price, Hollis Price, Harold Price, Bob Peters, MacLeone Bennett III, Mark Bennett, Bob Perrenot, Bob Perrenot, Jr., James Holloway Perrenot, Brent Bing and Byron Bing.

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