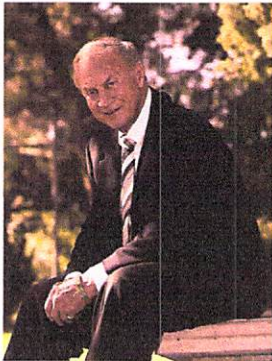


El Paso civic leader Jim Phillips has died

Daniel Borunda, El Paso Times 12:59 p.m. MST December 29, 2015



(Photo: Mark Lambie / Times file photo)

Longtime El Paso businessman and philanthropist Jim R. Phillips, who served in leadership positions with numerous civic groups, died on Monday, friends said.

Phillips, who was in his 80s and had been ill in recent years, had been credited for helping mentor and support many of El Paso's leaders over the decades.

Phillips started off in El Paso as the owner of what was then the region's top radio station KHEY-AM (690) and branched out into banking, according to El Paso Times archives. He helped form the multinational group that bought the State National Bank, which later became Norwest Bank and is now Wells Fargo Bank.

Phillips had been the member of the boards of more than 40 civic, education and charitable groups in El Paso.

"In my opinion, Jim was Mr. El Paso," said community leader Myrna Deckert, who knew Phillips for more than 35 years. "He was an awesome human being. I never heard him say a bad word about anyone."

Deckert retired earlier this year after two decades as the CEO and executive director of the El Paso YWCA.

Phillips had been ill in recent years and had slowed down but he was always in the thoughts of El Pasoans who knew him, Deckert said.

"He was kind. He was gentle. He was forward thinking," Deckert said. "He was a philanthropist in many ways. I never heard of anyone who asked Jim for anything that didn't get it whether it was his time or money."

Phillips was born in Dallas, served in the U.S. Air Force and graduated from Texas Christian University in 1958.

In 1969, Phillips arrived in El Paso from McAllen, Texas, after he had just bought radio station KHEY-AM (690), which was the top radio station in the market at the time, according to El Paso Times archives.

"I came to El Paso intending to stay for three years but the magic of the place got hold of me, and I'm still here," Phillips told the Times in 2008.

Phillips was chairman and CEO of KHEY Inc. from 1969 to 1989 and was chairman of Magic Media Inc. from 1994 to 2000.

Phillips had also been the chairman of the community board of directors for Wells Fargo Bank Texas.

An online resume for Phillips listed his work on dozens of boards of civic groups, including president of the El Paso Sun Carnival Association (1976), Texas Association of Broadcasters (1979) and the El Paso Chamber of Commerce (1980-1981).

Phillips was on the advisory and foundation boards of organizations such as Candlelighters of El Paso, Hospice of El Paso, El Paso Holocaust Museum, Center Against Family Violence and the El Paso Zoological Association.



Undated: Jim Phillips (Photo: Courtesy photo of T.J. Carlson)

He was on the boards of directors of the Texas Radio Hall of Fame, Project Arriba and chairman of fund raising efforts for the Boys Scouts and the University of Texas at El Paso.

In 2011, the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce Foundation established a \$25,000 endowed scholarship at UTEP in honor of Phillips.

The Jim R. Phillips Endowed Scholarship provides annual scholarships for students pursuing a degree at UTEP.

"I can't think of a better way to honor an individual whom we all hold in such high esteem than to create opportunities for talented young people in this region to pursue career paths that will ultimately enable them to contribute — as Jim Phillips has so consistently done — to the quality of life of this community," UTEP President Diana Natalicio said at the time.