

El Paso philanthropist J.O. Stewart dies at 81

Daniel Borunda, El Paso Times 11:02 p.m. MST January 27, 2016



(Photo: El Paso Times file)

J.O. Stewart, an El Paso businessman and philanthropist, died of a heart attack Wednesday at his home. He was 81.

Stewart and his wife, Marlene, helped shaped El Paso with their longtime support of the arts and charities, possibly signified most by the donation of more than 10 acres of land for the Texas Tech University Health Sciences medical school built in El Paso.

J.O. Stewart founded El Paso Disposal in 1970 and sold the company in 1999 in a stock and cash deal worth more than \$100 million. It started as a two-person company and had more than 300 employees when he sold it to a California company.

He and his wife were major supporters of classical music in El Paso. The El Paso Symphony dedicated its 2014-15 season to the couple.

"He was a man of faith and character," former El Paso state Rep. Dee Margo said. "He'd call me to talk Austin politics and was a longtime friend and supporter. He held George W. Bush's first fundraiser in El Paso at his home in '93 at my request when no one thought he had any chance against Ann Richards. J.O. had real musical talents and (was) a very strong Baptist. We'll miss him."

According to a 1999 article on [Waste360.com](http://waste360.com) (http://waste360.com/mag/waste_big_little_guys), J.O. Stewart was a music major who started the company with a rented truck and a \$5,000 loan from a friend.

In addition to supporting classical music, the Stewarts gave money to University of Texas at El Paso scholarships, religious institutions and cultural groups. They formed the Marlene and J.O. Stewart Jr. Foundation.

J.O. Stewart was a pioneer in the waste management industry, growing El Paso Disposal from a small local company to a regional business.

"He was a highly successful businessman in the waste management business, starting with one truck with himself as the driver starting in the early 1970s," El Paso businessman and friend Woody Hunt said.

Hunt said that Stewart helped create an industry model that other companies would follow.

Stewart was good natured, treated everyone with respect and was committed to helping others, Hunt said.

"He will be missed," Hunt said. "He set a very high standard for the rest of us in terms of his business success and his personal behavior."

Ron Acton, who worked for Stewart, said the death of his friend of more than 40 years has been tough. "I have been crying because he really meant so much to so many of us," Acton said.

Acton said that Stewart leaves a legacy of giving and supporting the El Paso community.

"We know how important Marlene and J.O. have been to this community, at UTEP, the arts and their church life," Acton said. "They are so important. They are such givers to our community."

"He was a beautiful man," Acton said. "A man of God. He lived his faith on a daily basis."

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