



Stillwater Pioneer Athlete Memorial



MYRL BRUCE GRAY

October 12, 1943 - January 29, 1997

Stillwater High School Class of 1961

2nd Annual Memorial Induction Ceremony

October 11, 1997

Bruce Gray began two memorable careers during the four years he spent at Stillwater High School - an exceptional career as a high school and college basketball player, and a truly legendary career as a vocational educator.

It was at Stillwater High School that Bruce developed the desire and the commitment to be a winner, learning many of those lessons on the basketball floor from Pioneer Coach Martin "Red" Loper, a man who had a great impact on Bruce's life. Coach Loper took a gangly 16 year-old kid and turned him into an all-state basketball star two years later.

During Bruce's basketball career at Stillwater, the Pioneers experienced some of their greatest seasons, winning the state championship two consecutive years. In his senior season in 1960-61, the Pioneers posted a 15-5 record. They went on to win the regional championship, but lost a heartbreaker in the state championship game. After his high school graduation, Bruce was recruited to play at junior college basketball powerhouse Cameron, helping them earn a ticket to the national junior college tournament. He finished his basketball career at Central State University.

It was also here in Stillwater the Bruce began a lifelong career in vocational education as a student in Gus Friedeman's distributive education class. He began teaching distributive education in 1967 in the small southeastern Oklahoma community of Stigler and in four short years turned an outdated program into the nation's best DECA chapter.

From Stigler, he moved to the post of assistant superintendent at Great Plains Area Vo-Tech School in Lawton where he served two years. In 1973, he returned to Stillwater as State DECA advisor, leaving in 1974 to spend three years in Washington, D.C. raising funds to build the National DECA Center. He returned to Oklahoma in 1977 as deputy superintendent of Great Plains Area Vo-Tech School, earning the superintendent's job the next year. In 1981, he was named superintendent at Francis Tuttle Vo-Tech Center in Oklahoma City.

Regardless of the job or circumstances, Bruce succeeded because of hard work, desire, commitment and a unique ability to get the most out of people. That magic paid dividends for him and rewards for the vo-tech education system. Educators across the state were awed by his successes.

While Bruce was always willing to share what worked in the past, he always tried to stay just one step ahead of everybody else. He had a competitive streak that drove him to strive for perfection and excellence. He had to be the first and he had to be the best. For him to finish second was just not acceptable. That drive to succeed was why he became known as one of Oklahoma's true visionaries, finding emerging needs and meeting them long before anybody else even identified them. During his 30 year vocational education career, Bruce rose to the pinnacle of his profession. He built a reputation for innovation and leadership, not only here in Oklahoma, but across America.

While Bruce established a number of firsts in his career, he also set a number of firsts in his private life as well. Few were his fishing peers. His skills at bass fishing were the stuff legends are made of. His bass fishin' career included a stint as a fishing guide, representing Oklahoma in a national bass tournament, and serving as a field tester for a major fishing lure company. Perhaps his greatest failure was that, although he wore one of Oklahoma's first leisure suits, he could never get the leisure suit craze to quite take hold. Bruce also served as the very first president of the Oklahoma Buck Owens fan club, crooning country music long before anybody else thought it was cool. He was a true whiz at ten-fouring everybody on the CB-radio, putting most long-distance truckers to shame.

It was that willingness to poke fun at himself, and his memorable peels of laughter when he did, that so endeared Bruce Gray to his friends, Bruce experienced legendary success, built hundreds of friendships, but through it all, still managed to stay the same old Bruce. Bruce Gray was truly a benchmark for all of us to measure ourselves against. Bruce Gray, a remarkable man and a remarkable friend.