



Shirley Area Residents Mourn the Death of Ben Polston

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By Stacy Cox

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The Shirley community was stunned recently as news spread of the unexpected death in the early morning on Sunday, April 18 of one of the town's most well-known and well-liked citizens, Ben Polston.

It is likely a rare thing, even in the smallest of towns, that a person can be known by so many with just the mention of his first name. Ben was that person in Shirley.

Ben was known for operating a bar and restaurant for more than 30 years on Railroad Street in a building he constructed in 1972. And, no doubt many people came to know him during the hundreds of card games played in the building next to the tavern that would later become Judy's Dairy Dip, which he operated for several years with his wife. But Ben was more than a local businessman to the people of Shirley.

To say he was a good friend to so many is an understatement. He was the best kind of friend, caring and generous and funny, offering friendship without judgment. No one can quite determine just how many people he helped through the years to keep their heat on in their homes or how many he provided with a place to stay during tough times in their lives, among the many acts of kindness he performed. His reputation of being a person everyone could count on preceded him.

Ben was also a supporter of most of the events held by civic groups in Shirley, though often his generosity was known only to the members of those groups as he typically requested anonymity. His modesty and humble nature were qualities that set him apart in a society that prizes recognition for every good deed. Rumor has that he was even reluctant to accept Shirley's annual David L. Estell Civic Award in 1999, though he was arguably one of the most deserving of the honor.

Like many other long-time residents of Shirley, Ben helped when and where he could because he cared about his community. Born in Kentucky, he moved to Shirley with his parents when he was a young boy. Colorful stories are numerous about Ben's early years and perhaps it was his less-than-ideal experiences during his younger days that gave him the ability to accept others despite their faults.

Yet, as easygoing as he was, he had little tolerance for those purposely causing trouble. This ability to generally maintain a problem-free establishment brought him the respect of other local business people and the town's officials.

It has been said that Ben was like a father to many and for some, a better father than the one they had. And, for dozens of kids in Shirley, Ben played the role of a favorite uncle, slipping them a few bucks at the gas station and telling them to buy themselves some candy. He also adored his family and talked proudly to others about his daughters and grandchildren.

Someone said last week, "It's just not going to be the same without him around." This is a sentiment likely shared by everyone who knew Ben Polston, no matter how personally. Though not the head of any organization, he was a leader in the Shirley community offering through his generosity and spirit a hope for everyone to improve their lives and be happy. Those touched by his goodness will undoubtedly miss him, but his passing should inspire all of us to strive to be better people.