

Advocate's Caddo legacy still unfolding: Man who helped establish wildlife refuge dies at 77

By Glenn Evans gevans@news-journal.com | Posted: Thursday, March 29, 2012 4:00 am

Dwight Shellman took on a task in 1993 that continues to open new trails in Northeast Texas after his passing.

Arriving at Caddo Lake from Colorado, where neighbor, music legend and Linden native Don Henley recruited him, Shellman guided many of the efforts that now preserve Texas' largest natural lake for wildlife and people drawn to the unique ecosystem.

Shellman succumbed to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, (ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease), earlier this month at his home near Woody Creek, Colo., to which he returned in 2006 after a dozen years at Caddo Lake.

He was 77.

A memorial is planned sometime in May on the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge that the attorney and community organizer was instrumental in founding.

It will follow a May 18 memorial in Aspen, where Shellman left a similar legacy of coalition building as an elected official and controlled growth advocate.

"Dwight Shellman was a brilliant man, a true visionary," Henley said. "Although he was not a native of East Texas, he accomplished many good things for this area, the benefit of which will become more and more apparent as time goes on."

One small facet of that legacy, an observation trail designed for horseback vistas, will be dedicated Saturday amid the hardwoods and pines guarding the acres where America once made bombs off the Caddo Lake shoreline.

"Obviously, the first impact was right in the Caddo Lake area," said Richard Lowerre, who succeeded Shellman at the nonprofit eco-education and research Caddo Lake Institute. "I think he opened eyes, helped people understand the kind of things you can do to protect your resources, protect your community, and how you do it — from the bottom-up, get together and we can do it."

Shellman and others looked at the Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant, which ended production a year after he arrived, and saw the national wildlife refuge that opened in September 2009.

"Among other things, Dwight deserves the lion's share of credit for the establishment of the Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge," said Henley, a popular solo musician and co-founder of the Eagles. "He shepherded that project, year after year, overcoming obstacle after obstacle, *until* he got it done."