

A Tribute to the Citizen of the Year

ASHS Column for February 28, 2008

Jerry Simmons

By the time you read this column, the combined Annual Century-Flomaton Chamber of Commerce banquet will be over. Last Tuesday night, all the platitudes were said and the awards were given. Flomaton and Century acknowledge citizens in three categories: Citizen, Business and Student of the Year. The Ledger will no doubt have coverage of the banquet and you may have already read about the recipients of those awards. However, the subject of this week's column is Century's Citizen of the Year, Jerry Orson Fischer. I had the honor of presenting him with this award and I said some things from my heart about him, and I decided to share them with you here.

I consider this man to be my very best friend of all time. We have been as close as brothers, and at the same time, as far apart in some matters as any two people could be. Jerry has a lot of best friends, though. I told him more than once that there are a lot of things he is wrong about, but he doesn't know it. If you know him, you'll likely agree with me that there are very few times he has no opinion. His wife, Elena, has been merciful to him over these past 45-plus years; I have seen a scary look in her eye from time to time, but the old man means so much to her that she grins and bears it.

What can be said about this man that could diminish the good that he has done for his community? He has been a friend to just about everyone he's met; he's been generous to the community with his time and talents; he's been a good provider to his family, and all-in-all a man whose time for acknowledgement by his community has come.

Jerry was a councilman for the Town of Century more than 24 years. During that time he was always for the elderly and poor people in the town. When there were grants available for housing, he lost his last campaign partly because he spoke out against overlooking those who slept with holes in

their roof and those who could not speak out for themselves. There were people who disagreed with him in principle but who yet had no convincing argument to the contrary when it came time to be fair and equitable. Jerry believes in doing right by everyone, not a select few.

In the 1960s, Jerry was one of the original members of the South Flomaton Volunteer Fire Department, because he felt that was a service the community needed. He was one of several who spearheaded facilitating an election to combine South Flomaton and Century. Some might think that wasn't such a good thing, but in reality Century is much better off with it done.

At various times Jerry's been a member and/or officer in just about every local civic organization, such as the Lions Club. His contemporaries must have thought well of him and his leadership ability, because he was elected to head the Little League. He worked selflessly in the



Picture by Neal Collier

Century Recreation Association to make a place for boys and girls who otherwise would have no direction. He coached, he worked in fundraising, he did anything he could to make all he was involved in to be successful. He's passed that on to his boys and now his grandchildren, who all rely upon his judgment and respect him deeply.

He once told a friend that when he went to Hawaii with his family and entered high school there, many of the Hawaiian boys didn't like white boys. That's where he really became interested in boxing, so he could defend himself. The discipline that's required in training for boxing taught him valuable lessons on how that if you wanted something bad enough, there are sacrifices that must be made. He's followed that philosophy throughout his adult life and it's done him well.

He wanted to provide a boat landing for the outdoorsmen in the area, so 30 or so years ago he got a group of young men together (yes, I was young once) and had a cement truck come in to pour a boat ramp just about where the boat landing is today. In later years, he fought for and helped the Town of Century secure grant funds to create a real boat landing, which today is named for him, Fischer Landing.

He has a love for the environment and for years has worked with groups to go down the river, cleaning up the garbage ignorant people leave behind or deliberately toss out of their boats or their cars and trucks. Tires, old barbecue grills, Styrofoam coolers and cups; you name it – he's been responsible for picking up thousands of pounds of debris from the creek and river banks in this region.

If it were not for Jerry's love of history, hundreds of photographs and records would have been destroyed. Because of his interest, these records and pictures are categorized and saved for posterity. His dedication to the Alger-Sullivan Historical Society is legend. He's long been the driving force behind many projects to preserve not only Century's heritage, but that of Flomaton and Jay, and for miles around.

When the news came out that Jerry was sick, there was hardly anyone in Century or Flomaton whose heart did not go out to him and his family. Wherever one went, there was always a question, "Have you heard how Jerry's doing?"

Wherever he goes, whatever he does, people remember him. He is an unforgettable person, whose constant smile and banter make all who meet him for the first time feel better for having been around him. He has left his mark. This town, this community, this world is a better place because Jerry Fischer has been here.