

## Don Davis of LaBelle dies at 82



By RAOUL BATALLER

LABELLE, FL (Friday, March 23, 2018) — Don Davis, former county commissioner and advocate for all of Hendry County, who welcomed personally one and all to his restaurants with warm courtesy, everybody's cordial innkeeper, a judicious public servant who cared for all people and their problems, and presided over an extended family, succumbed Wednesday, March 21, to virulent cancer. He was 82.

Visitation at Carlson Memorial United Methodist church in LaBelle at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, March 27 will be followed by a memorial service at noon.

The clarity of his judgment and firmness of his convictions echoed the character of those whose pictures he carefully mounted in frames to occupy places of honor on his wall, John Wayne, President Ronald Reagan, and other conservatives.

There never was a doubt when Don Davis spoke what he meant. He listened well, chose his words deliberately, as if they'd easily stand the test of time. His conversation could be surprisingly rapid-fire and take surprise turns around to inquiry about members of your family and how you got along with them. He wondered about you.

And so he played, and worked, hard. An audience of 3,500 at a Las Vegas show saw him and his friends take to their stage and wave off the conductor's question about what key he needed for whatever he was going to sing. "I don't know nothin' about that, just play and we'll follow along," he declared. A few weeks ago, he was still singing. A sample of that rhythm and style was posted in a video on Facebook today.

He was raised in Panama City, FL, a Mormon, always a churchgoer, attending Methodist services. His mother scolded him as a child for raiding the family pantry for supplies with which to make sandwiches he could sell on the street.

Business came natural and constantly to Davis. After graduation from Bay High school in '55, and a stint with his brother Wayne in the Army with time as an MP, he came to LaBelle in '64, and started managing a gas station on the north side of Rte 80 which Don and his brother eventually acquired and became the Big V. gas station and convenience store, and the Big V (which was a nickname for Don) restaurant and motel which had been a line of small stores. Wayne and brother Carol both predeceased Don.

Don and Tommy Smith started a local radio station which became a newspaper, the Southwest Florida News. Don never lost his love of the newspaper business.

He bought the Big Oak Steakhouse on Hall Street in LaBelle

from Nancy and her husband Ronny about 22 years ago and renamed it "Don's." She also owned the Long Branch, and Don bought that, too. They all had kids the same age who grew up together.

Don is survived by children Ricky Thibodeaux, Patsy Bostick, Teri Gail Armstrong, Paula Sue Hall and Kimberly Perkins, as well as sister Carolyn Sue Davis of Panama City. The children have shown signs of having the same business aptitude for landing on their feet.

### County Commissioner

A tough business reversal at the hands of a dishonest county commissioner propelled Don into a winning election campaign in '70, then lost in '74. He held office from '76 until he lost in '86. He had become close with fellow county commissioners Phil Roland and Harold White of Clewiston. He was determined to run until he regained it, and ran again in '88 and '96, then in '08 running and losing without a major party nomination, until he won in '12 as a Democrat, losing in '16.

Davis fondly recalled with Roland a period before Hendry County submitted to NAACP threats, and dutifully broke the county elections into small contests in which candidates only stood for votes within the confines of their districts.

Davis pushed and won approval for a popular vote on countywide elections to replace the current system. Other commissioners were indifferent, although Davis argued hard that a commissioner who voted on matters affecting the entire county should, as a matter of principle, have to stand for reelection before the entire county.

The commissioners received a 63% vote of approval from the voters, and have ignored it. No one on county staff has argued the existence of an obligation to execute the wishes of the public that pays their salaries.

The county attorney has prognosticated on what expenses might be incurred proving to a judge that discriminatory practices in Hendry county voting are a thing of the past, suggesting that a political scientist's services would be a possible expense, although there have been no reported instances in two or more decades of a white person attempting to interfere in a black person's casting a vote.

There has been little attempt to compare the ineffectiveness of Hendry County voting since the by-district voting was imposed two decades ago. Most of the time since then has been devoted to representatives of the districts struggling in two-to-three stand-offs, with little to show for their time and expense over the years.



*The South Florida Water Management district, second largest in the nation, is asked*

*How do we get the State of Florida to understand that the federal agencies are contributing to the devastation of our resources?*

SPECIAL TO THE SUNDAY NEWS

WEST PALM BEACH, FL (Thursday, Feb. 1, 2018) — At today's meeting of the Water Resources Analysis Coalition (WRAC) were numerous observations involving initiatives of the South Florida Water Management district being frustrated over the last 20 years by impediments raised by the U.S. Department of the Interior and its National Park Service.

A new WRAC board member, Mike Elfenbein, wanted to know,

"I'm here because I spent 20 years looking at the damage that everything that happens here contributed to.

"So when I sit here and listen to people say they've been hearing this for 20 years, and Josh says if he were in his business doing this for 20 years he wouldn't be in business. If I were in my business and doing this for 20 years, and the same partner was constantly putting holes in the hull of my ship, he wouldn't be either.

"So, I can't help but wonder why nobody addresses the root of the problem.

"Everybody here mentions it. We all agree with it. Even the people from those agencies accept that their agency is part of the problem.

"So why is there no effort being made to rectify those issues. Why has nobody done anything about either taking the Seaside Sparrow off the Endangered Species list, or limiting the manipulation and ability to manipulate that the Parks Service and the Department of Interior seem to use on a regular basis?

"Obviously, the District wouldn't be the right body for that, but certainly the District has the ability to direct it, or at least guide it.

"How do we get the State of Florida to understand that the federal agencies are contributing to the devastation of our resources, and get the State of Florida to do something about that?

"Because as long as the Park Service and the Department of the Interior have the ability to destroy our resources with no recourse, they will continue to do so.

"Is there anyone who can answer that . . . how we can get that to happen?"