

# Shelba Spears accepts nomination without late husband, John

**How do you feel about being nominated Citizen of the Year?**  
 "Thank you. I am humbled," she said in an emotional voice. "I want to do things for other people, but I don't expect any recognition for it."

**By Darragh Doiron**  
 The News staff writer

A true volunteer doesn't seek acknowledgment, but those who they serve are often compelled to sing their praises. Sometimes, people take a moment to let you know you are special to them.

In a unique twist in the three years of Port Arthur News Citizen of the Year nominations, a host of people decided to honor the same couple: Shelba and John Spears.

John Spears died just as the nomination process was being completed.

Participants are typically surprised when The News calls to announce that they are nominees. Shelba Spears was not. In the days after the funeral, many friends let her know that they had thought of the couple enough to nominate them.

Spears was a tad reluctant to accept, but did so when assured that her husband's name would be included in the honor.

"My thoughts were that I wish he were here to know about the nomination," she said.

They were chairmen of the Griffing Park Neighborhood Patrol and were known for checking on neighbors, especially widows. They made sure they were safe and healthy.

"That was his passion, I guess. He loved doing that. He wanted this to be a safe and secure neighborhood," Shelba Spears said.

Norma Huckabay, Sissie Veal, Jean and Vernon Andrews, Tom Dunlop, Frances Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Homer Haber, Judy Lofton, Wanda H. Hefley, Mary B. Pandella, Gloria and Bob Sharpless and Byron Jarratt nominated the couple for Citizen of the Year.

Shelba is retired from the Port Arthur Independent School District. John retired from Texaco.

Spears continues her neighborhood patrol but has scaled back. She can handle just so much. But after years of being in contact with each other, she has found her charges have strengthened into a broader network.

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**"I think it has led to more of a feeling of community, like we used to have."**

**Shelba Spears,**  
 on the Griffing Park Neighborhood Patrol

have," she said. The Sharpless letter had an anecdote that one woman says that if you have an accident, "Don't call 9-1-1, call the Spears first."

Calling them an "ideal couple," Mrs. Sharpless said their generous, sympathetic nature and concern for friends and acquaintances make them one of a kind.

Sissie Veal's note about her father and stepmother included extra health care services.

"I have heard their stories of emergencies to the hospital, someone breaking into their houses, needing rides to the doctors' offices, calling their relatives for them, checking on their house when something goes wrong. To put it simply, if they need someone, they call Shelba and my Dad," Veal reports.

The Habers called them "very caring" and Judy Loftin called them a "driving and constant force" behind the citizen patrol group. Francis Campbell mentioned their community activity, such as work at Museum of the Gulf Coast.

The Andrews note that the Spears are "very dedicated to helping others" and even helped landscape their area with trees and flowers.

Hefley writes that Mr. Spears checked on widows and shut-ins regularly.

"I know he has taken them to the



Mike Tobias/The News

Shelba Spears and her husband, John, were nominated as a team by several people. He died during the nomination process.

hospital and stayed with them. When Shelba retired after teaching at Tyrrell many years, she started helping ... they call over 100 people a week," Hefley wrote.

Norma Huckabay's letter reads, "Shelba and John Spears have been a blessing to those of us who live in

Griffing Park and surrounding areas."

Veal reports Shelba is also active in Teachers Sorority and Teachers Retirement, teaches Sunday School at Central Baptist Church and serves as a docent at the Museum of the Gulf Coast.

**SHELBA SPEARS AND THE LATE JOHN SPEARS**

**AGE:** 68  
**CITY:** Port Arthur  
**FAMILY:** Shelba Spears recently lost her husband, John. They were nominated as a team. Their children are: Sissie Veal, Jimmy Spears, Jack Spears and Steven Spears.  
**OCCUPATION:** She is retired from Port Arthur Independent School District. He retired from Texaco.

**NOMINATED BY:**  
 Shelba Spears and her husband, John, were nominated as a team by several people. He died during the nomination process. Norma Huckabay, Sissie Veal, Jean and Vernon Andrews, Tom Dunlop, Frances Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Homer Haber, Judy Lofton, Wanda H. Hefley, Mary B. Pandella, Gloria and Bob Sharpless and Byron Jarratt nominated them.

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**SPECIAL THOUGHTS**

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# Gillam's passion for helping others continues to grow

**How do you feel about being nominated Citizen of the Year?**  
 "I am tickled to death."

**By Mary Meaux**  
 The News staff writer

Numerous students have passed through Judge Tom Gillam III's courtroom but it's one of his first cases that means so much to him.

In his pristine office, surrounded by photographs of his family, Gillam tells of an 18-year-old tenth grader who was sent to Gillam's court for skipping school. As Gillam looked through the case files he saw the young man's highest grade in school at that time was a 38; his other grades were zeros.

"It bothered me so bad I had to recess court," he said. "While I was in my office I noticed his report card. For the first three weeks of school the boy was an honor roll kid then he bot-tomed out."

At first Gillam thought the student couldn't read so he tested him, right there in court. But reading wasn't the problem so the judge took the student under his wing. The young man began to pull his grades up, attended summer school and some night school classes.

"One of my most gratifying moments came in June 2006. I received this call. He said this is so-and-so. I want you to know I graduated from Memorial and was on the honor roll. I'm planning to attend Prairie View College," he said.

The student, Gillam said, had no father and his mother worked.

"He could have been given to the court system but now he's a very productive part of the community. That's the kind of story that moves me," he said.

Gillam's passion for helping others is likely tied to his strong sense of family.

When his mother was in the prime of her life, she was struck down with a massive stroke.

"It was April 7, 1972, 6 a.m. in the morning. She had just adopted my little sister, who was nine months old at the time. My mom was getting ready for work and I was a senior in high school getting ready to graduate. She fell with a massive stroke and we had to make sacrifices," he said. "My brother was in Vietnam and my dad was working nights. I was all set to go to the University of Houston Medical School when it happened. I ended up staying at home voluntarily to take care of my mother and 9-month-old sister."

The lifelong Port Arthur resident is

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**Judge Tom Gillam III,**  
 on helping a troubled teen improve his school grades

the son of a pastor and found his calling to the ministry in 1991. He and his father worked together at the Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ until his father's death in 1999. In 2000 Gillam assumed the role of pastor.

"My dad was my best friend, neighbor, pastor and father," he said.

Gillam's father did not have an education and left school in the third grade to help support his family. But he never let the lack of education hold him back, Gillam said. This taught Gillam perseverance.

"There's not much you can't do if you have a mind to do it and if God's in it," he said.

The judge and pastor likes to tell people he has seven children all by the same woman, his wife of 32 years, Rosanna. Of those children two are educators, one is a pharmacy technician, one is a social services worker, one is in college with plans to become a nurse and another is in college to learn skills for automotive techni-



Mike Tobias/The News

Judge Tom Gillam loves helping troubled teens get back on the right path. Pictured here, Gillam stands in his courtroom at the Port Arthur Sub-Courthouse.

cian. Two of the children are working on their master's degrees at this time.

"God has been good to us," he said.

Gillam was nominated Port Arthur News Citizen of the Year by Ike Mills. Mills, who has known Gillam for almost 20 years, describes him as an elected official who goes above and beyond the call of duty, something Gillam also did when he was on city council a number of years ago.

"Integrity plays a major role and shows in his support," Mills wrote in his nomination letter. "You can't find

a better person to work with who understands the community."

**JUDGE TOM GILLAM III TIDBITS**

The lifelong Port Arthur resident is the son of a pastor and found his calling to the ministry in 1991.

He and his father worked together at the Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ until his father's death in 1999.

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**JUDGE TOM GILLAM III**

**AGE:** 53  
**CITY:** Port Arthur  
**FAMILY:** wife of 32 years, Rosanna, seven children  
**OCCUPATION:** Jefferson County Justice of the Peace

**NOMINATED BY:**  
 Ike Mills: "Judge Gillam has spent the past 28 years serving the public in various capacities.

Judge Gillam is the father of seven children with two attending college and four college graduates and he has been married for 32 years.

Judge Gillam is a 1972 graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School and also attended Lamar University.

His accomplishments include: long time labor leader, volunteer for three years at Texas Youth Commission at the AI Price Youth Facility working with troubled kids, past Democratic Precinct Chair, served on the Citizen Ad Hoc Fire Committee, past president of PA Housing Authority Finance Committee, Port Arthur City Council member for nine years and served as Mayor Pro-tem, helped formulate the low to moderate income home purchase for the City of Port Arthur, Pastor of the Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ for seven years, currently serves as Justice of the Peace for Precinct 8 for Jefferson County where he has initiated numerous programs to work with troubled youth."