

Texas barbecue legend remembered as 'fierce advocate' for co-op members

By Melissa Segrest

Richard "Rick" Schmidt, a Texas barbecue legend and larger-than-life member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors for more than two decades, died at age 73 on Feb. 11, 2019. He was board chairman from 2002 to 2014 and oversaw significant modernization of the cooperative.

During that time, Bluebonnet upgraded every aspect of its business from facilities to technology, adding advanced tools in the field; building a new headquarters, substations and member service centers; upgrading the co-op's system for mapping and monitoring power outages, including a state-of-the-art control center; and more.

In 2018, Schmidt was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 43 years, Evelyn Schmidt.

"Rick had an enormous influence on Bluebonnet and its members during his 25 years on the Board of Directors," said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's Board chairman. "He brought a keen eye for business and a strong sense of fairness, right and wrong. He was never afraid to look you in the eye and speak his mind with total honesty. He was a true leader whose presence will be missed and can never be completely replaced."

From 1984 to 2010, Schmidt was owner of the storied Kreuz Market, a 119-year-old restaurant in Lockhart, long considered by many to be the home of some of Texas' finest barbecue. He retired after he sold the business to his son, Keith Schmidt.

Consistency and customer service were Rick Schmidt's bedrock beliefs as a businessman, community leader and member of the Bluebonnet Board. "He was slow to change, but he was all about making things more efficient and making things easier, especially for a customer," his son said. "We've had generations of families come in (to Kreuz Market) and say this is just as good as it was 20 years ago. You have to keep the soul and the spirit of the place alive, no matter what you may add or take away from it."

Rick Schmidt brought that same passion



A younger Rick Schmidt, showing off the famous barbecue at Kreuz Market on the cover of a magazine in 1994. *Texas Highways magazine photo*

to his work as a Bluebonnet Board member. "Rick was a fierce advocate for our members and strong supporter of our employees," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "One of Rick's greatest attributes was that you always knew what he was thinking and where you stood with him. We will remember his honesty, loyalty, integrity and unwavering work ethic. We faced some critical challenges during the last decade. Rick was unafraid to make the toughest decisions, which was integral to his and Bluebonnet's success during his tenure as board chairman."

Schmidt was born on Dec. 6, 1945. A Lockhart native, he graduated from Lockhart High School and, in 1968, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Texas Christian University, where he was a baseball scholarship recipient.

For a time, he worked as a salesman for large food distribution companies but took the reins at Kreuz Market in 1984 when his father, Edgar "Smitty" Schmidt, who had bought the business in 1948, sold it to Rick and his brother, Don.

Rick Schmidt was on the Lockhart Chamber of Commerce and was its president twice. "He always worked for the betterment

of Lockhart and its citizens," Keith Schmidt said. His stubbornness and straight talk were well-known. "He wouldn't hold back if something needed to be said, especially if he felt it was his duty. He would say it," his son said. Rick Schmidt's friends said his gruff exterior disguised a heart of gold.

Schmidt was proud of his role as a leader at Bluebonnet. "He felt that most of the members of the co-op were people like him, so the decisions he would make would be the decisions his constituents would also make," his son said. "It wasn't what was best for the (cooperative). It wasn't what was best for the Board. It was what was best for the co-op member. That's how he conducted himself at Bluebonnet, at Kreuz Market and anything else he did."

Rick and Evelyn Schmidt were active members of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Maxwell, a small community near Lockhart. They supported the Maxwell Social Club, and after his retirement from barbecue eight years ago, they enjoyed traveling in their RV. He loved to hunt and fish as well. They were especially fond of old-style country music and Western swing dancing. In 2018, Rick Schmidt was key to bringing the Western Swing and BBQ Festival to Lockhart.

Standing at Kreuz Market near his father's favorite round table, with Rick's name emblazoned on it, Keith Schmidt said, "It always had a 'reserved' sign on it, and it's gonna stay that way." The table was adorned with flowers and photos in memory of his father.

Rick Schmidt was buried on Valentine's Day. He and Evelyn "were forever Valentines," their son said. "He had a really hard time after she passed. I have no doubt if she were still alive they'd both be here. I guess the best way you could say it was that he lost his joy. So many people have said it, and I believe it: He died of a broken heart."

After his father's death, Keith Schmidt posted a tribute on his Facebook page: "So long, Dad, we'll keep the table reserved for you and Evelyn to watch music on Sunday. I'll miss you more than anyone knows, but also know more than anyone how happy you were to see Evelyn's face in the light."

Rick Schmidt is survived by sons Keith and Leeman Schmidt, brother Don Schmidt and sister Nina Sells, a granddaughter, a great-granddaughter, and numerous other family members and friends. □



Melissa Segrest photo

Rick Schmidt was on the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors for 25 years and was board chairman for 12 years. He was a passionate advocate for co-op members. Schmidt, left, with some of his hunting dogs in a 2006 photo, and above, dancing with wife Evelyn Schmidt at the Bluebonnet Annual Meeting in 2017. She died less than a year before he did.

Sarah Beal photo