

MONTEVALLO'S CATHERINE LEGG

Shelby County Reporter

Describing the lasting impact the late Catherine Bridges Legg had on her community requires the use of words such as service, leadership and dedication. Legg, who died in early January at age 95, spent her life working for the good of Montevallo and her family, both of which she loved deeply.

Legg's adoration for Montevallo started soon after she and her family moved to the city when she was 12 years old. "She said she fell in love with Montevallo," said Tom Smitherman, one of Legg's four sons. "She loved Montevallo more than anybody that I've ever known, loving their community. It meant the world to her for Montevallo to look good, and she thought it was just the perfect place."

For many years, Legg worked at Alabama Refractory Clay Company, which mined clay in Montevallo and Calera to sell to steel mills. She started as a secretary, became manager and, eventually, bought the company, Smitherman said. In addition to establishing herself as a business owner, Legg was a church leader and an active community member. Her tireless work for the city of Montevallo reflected the care she had for her hometown. Legg served multiple terms on the Montevallo City Council, making even more connections with her fellow citizens, including Sharon Anderson. Anderson said she was appointed to fill Legg's seat on the City Council after she moved outside of the city limits and could no longer serve. Anderson, who went on to serve as Montevallo's mayor from 2004-2008, said she and Legg developed a close friendship. "She was the most civic-minded person I've ever known," Anderson said. "If you talked long enough with her in a conversation, it always turned to the city of Montevallo—how much she loved it, but also how she wanted to improve it to make it nice enough where people would want to come and live." Anderson described Legg as "funny and smart," and added, "She got the job done."

Promoting Montevallo came naturally to Legg and made her a great fit for the job of Chamber of Commerce director, a position she approached with passion and creativity. "A lot of people in Montevallo would remember the persona she created for the Chamber Chatter, Sammy Squirrel," said Glenda Smitherman, Tom's wife. "She would give all the town news from the perspective of Sammy Squirrel. That became a fun thing for anyone to read." Legg also worked for the city as its zoning officer and in other capacities. "She served on many boards of the city during her many years of service to the city and as a citizen," Anderson said. "She was a great leader for those boards." According to Anderson, Legg helped write grants to secure funding for a new senior center and was instrumental in designing a new entranceway to Montevallo's Orr Park, complete with a gateway similar to one located on the University of Montevallo campus. Legg also founded a student leadership program called Leaders of Tomorrow at Montevallo Middle School. And, as if she were not busy enough, Legg wrote as a community columnist for the *Shelby County Reporter* for years.

Among her many roles, however, is one that Tom remembered more fondly than the others. "A lot of people

know about what she did in the community," he said. "What most people don't know is the kind of mother she was." Tom said Legg kept books for several companies and did tax returns for many individuals and companies. "During tax season from January to May every year when I was a young child, she'd come home from her regular job, fix us supper and then start working on income tax returns till 2 or 3 in the morning," Tom said. "She would get a couple hours of sleep, wake up and get us ready. She was just unbelievably intelligent and work-oriented. She was pretty remarkable."

In her later years, Glenda said Legg was known to walk her dog, Albert, around town regularly. "Everybody would always say something about seeing Catherine and her dog," Glenda said. "That was well into her 80s." She walked every day until she no longer could, Tom said. Each walk was just another chance to see the community she loved.



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