

REMEMBERING DAVID L. HOWARD

by Bob Funkhouser

I've never thought about having to write this one but here goes. Mary Howard, Christy Womack, Jennifer Connelly, and Jeffrey Howard, in addition to their families and the extended Dabora family, lost a husband, father, grandfather, leader, mentor, father figure and friend with the passing of Saddle Horse Report founder David L. Howard, 72. A perfect storm of different issues following complications from a collarbone surgery took him from us but thankfully he left us all with lots of shared wisdom and examples to follow in addition to the desire to be a better person each and every day.

Everyone he held a relationship with, whether that be his children, a bank president, government official, a company employee or the groom of one of his family's horses, he held to the highest of standards. That was no different from what he demanded of himself every day and in every situation. His grit and desire to succeed was infectious. His demand for excellence was so evident that having him respect you or approve of a piece of work you've done was an incredible feeling. His son Jeffrey said it well in his comments at the service. "My dad loving you is one thing, him respecting you is a totally different level."

"As a businessman, our dad showed us that hard work, discipline and doing the right thing was a way to achieve success that would allow you to overcome other shortcomings that you may have. I will always remember what he said, 'If you want to be successful, find your competitor and drive by his office on your way to work and if he is already there, the next day you better wake up 30 minutes earlier. And, on your way home, drive by his office and if he is still there, turn around and go back to the office.'"

Sister Jennifer added to the remembrance of their dad. "My sister Christy was telling a story about dad being a teacher to us and many others. That resonated so much with me. Dad was always teaching us. He was teaching us with his words, by his example, by challenging us and sometimes by letting us figure things out on our own."

The oldest of the Howard siblings Christy has long lived by one of her dad's favorite creeds, "You make the best decisions when you have the best information."

Jeffrey also spoke of how his dad started Dabora, Inc. and treated many of the employees as family. Several of us have been a part of that family for more than 30 years.

I've been so blessed to think of him and Mary as a second set of parents. Something clicked that day back in 1983 when I walked into his office for the first job interview I had ever been to in my life. We went a lot of miles together, worked hard and played hard. Of the many, many things that I considered traits to emulate, one wasn't a learned trait; it was something that comes from within – sincere care. While David was known to be a hard ass, both personally and professionally, he had a huge heart and deep-rooted love for his family and community and a genuine love for the horses and people in the industries he served. While he was always so busy with several projects going on at one time and serving on boards and community service projects, he always had time to care about what was going on in your



David L. Howard founded Saddle Horse Report and built an outstanding publishing company in Dabora, Inc.



Family was the centerpiece of David's life. This is from daughter Christy and Rick Womack's wedding. TOP ROW - Brooke Connelly, Cole Connelly, Holt Parsons, David Parsons Bottom Row - Sam Connelly, Caroline Connelly, Russ and Jennifer Connelly, David Howard, Christy and Rick Womack, Mary Howard, Blake Howard, Jax Howard, Jeffrey and Mindee Howard



The new Dabora facility in Shelbyville, TN was a source of pride.



David spent many hours behind his desk, often the first to arrive and the last to leave.

service projects, he always had time to care about what was going on in your life, whether you were family, extended family or a customer. When it came to anonymously helping those in need locally, especially young people trying to get through school and better themselves, he was second to no one.

David's zest for equine publications came as a summer intern for the Voice Of The Tennessee Walking Horse and thus that was his background. He did great things for The Celebration during its heyday. When he started Saddle Horse Report and acquired Horse World Magazine, he surrounded himself with people that knew the American Saddlebred and later Morgan industries and continued that practice throughout his life. He took the time to ask and learn about industry issues and when asked, gave of his time and expertise to help individuals and associations alike. He also became an owner and exhibitor of American Saddlebreds and Hackneys being associated with Redd Crabtree, Donna Moore, Castle Hills Farm, Tom Moore, Pat and Julie (Kaufman) McConnell, Jimmy Miller and Mike Barlow.

"David approached me a couple of times about coming to work for him but I turned him down," recalled Bill Carrington, the paper's first editor. "I finally said yes and we hired Peggy Richardson and Mary Jane Crowson, opened an office in Nashville and in six weeks had our first issue out."

David served and helped the United Professional Horseman's Association (UPHA), the American Saddlebred Horse Association (ASHA) and the American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA) in so many ways. He served as Treasurer for the ASHA from 2003 through 2008 and was honored with UPHA's Distinguished Service Award in 1990.



David (second from left) with the first staff of Saddle Horse Report, Peggy Richardson, Bill Carrington and Mary Jane Crowson.

"He was the type of guy that when he spoke, I listened," remembered past UPHA and ASR President Chuck Herbert.

"During my tenure as President I couldn't have had a closer friend, ally or supporter of the American Saddlebred Horse Association," said Fred Sarver. "His work ethic and integrity were outstanding. He was just rock solid without a chink in his armor. If there was a situation he believed in he fought for what he thought was right and never backed up."

"There was also a side of David Howard that some people didn't see or know about. He was very generous and that was with his time, friendship and resources. He was greatly appreciated by his friends"

Working side by side with David for many years gave me a desire to take his vision and those of former Saddle Horse Report

editors Bill Carrington and Mary Jane Crowson and keep building a better product. He challenged us every day to be better in and out of the office and that won't change just because he's not here to slam his fist on the desk and say, "dammit Funkhouser." Oddly enough I'll miss those days, just as much as the days we would have a drink and talk trash about his beloved University of Tennessee and my University of Kentucky. He would beat his chest during football season and it was my turn during basketball season.

I'm really not sure how to close this. An ending is not something I ever envisioned with the man I thought of as my second dad. But, I guess it's not really an ending if those of us who loved the best of him take that and use it to enrich all aspects of our lives. Then it's just.... "until I see you again."



Taken in the early '80s this was the production and sales staff for Saddle Horse Report: David Howard, Patricia McHaffie, Donna Clanton, Elaine Stacy, unidentified, Steve Morrow, Janene Leonhirth, Barabara Norton, Theresa Daniels, Priscilla Thornberry, Bob Funkhouser and Tim Doll. Stacy, Morrow and Funkhouser are still a part of the Dabora family.



Ponies also became a part of the Howard family's show string. He is pictured here with Anna Marie Knipp, Sugar Free, Christy (Howard) Womack and Jimmy Miller.



Getting out of his comfort zone, David wanted to experience what his customers did so he learned to drive and show Callaway's Feature Story.



In 1990 Bob Funkhouser presented David with the UPHA Distinguished Service Award.