

## BOBBY AND JEAN DAVIS -- COOKEVILLE'S DYNAMIC DUO

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**Jean and Bobby Davis both served as Mayor of Cookeville during their long-standing careers in community service.**

**COOKEVILLE -- Bobby and Jean Davis** have given years of community service to the city of Cookeville and to the Upper Cumberland area. **Both have served as mayor and Jean is Cookeville's current vice-mayor and was Cookeville's first woman mayor from 1994 to 1998.**



"She was mayor, vice-mayor and member of the city council, so she's filled all three positions -- the only women to ever do that," said Bobby.

A well-known Cookeville pharmacist, Bobby preceded her as mayor by serving two three-year-terms from 1967, when he was 31 and perhaps one of the youngest Tennessee mayors at that time, until 1973.

Charles Denning, then editor of the Herald-Citizen, wrote this of Bobby on his retirement as mayor. "Probably no mayor in the country was better informed about his city, about its functions and what was happening in it and to it. Mr. Davis made it his business to know."

Now in their 70s, they've been married 52 years and have lived in their present home for 47 of those years.

Bobby and Jean have the easy, friendly manners of people who have worked with the public for years, and a glimpse of their long list of accomplishments makes you realize why this energetic couple gives new meaning to the words "discipline" and "dedication."

For recreation they play golf, like working in the yard and Jean's passion for wildflowers is well known.

"We walk three miles in the neighborhood every morning at 5:30, if it's not below 28 degrees," said Bobby. "If it's that cold, we walk inside at the Tennessee Tech fitness center. Walking has been a part of our daily scheduled for years."

Bobby played the saxophone in the Cookeville High School Band; and Jean plays the piano for relaxation, but when I asked if she ever plays for other people, she said, "Nooo! All those years I took piano we had to have recitals, and I just hated those recitals. Talk about something traumatic."

Bobby said, "She doesn't mind getting up and speaking in front of two or three hundred people but she . . ."

"I'd rather get up and speak than play the piano," interjected Jean.

Born in Monroe, in Overton County, Jean is the only daughter of William Alphonso Coleman and Beulah A. Smith Coleman.

"My parents were teachers in Overton County and my mother graduated from Tennessee Tech in 1933," Jean explained. "Not long after we moved here, my father was killed in an accident on east Spring Street, at the triangle. I was seven and my brother was about two and a half, so we were raised by a single parent."

Bobby's dad, Cecil Davis, was born in Cookeville, the grandson of Henry P. Davis, the first representative to the state legislature from Putnam County who lived in Putnam County. The Davis family lived in Harriman for a number of years, but moved to Cookeville in 1944.

"Daddy graduated from the University of Tennessee School of Pharmacy in 1926, and had worked in a drug store in Harriman for many years," Bobby recalled. "My father, Cecil Davis, owned the West Side Drug Store on Broad Street where Darwin Mall is now, next door to Letter Perfect. My dad always called it the Cecil Davis West Side Drug Store because he said, if you could associate a name with your business, it was good advertising. In 1963, we decided we needed to be nearer the hospital, so we built another store, Medical Care Pharmacy, and operated both stores until 1976 when my dad died."

Jean and Bobby knew each other growing up and dated some in high school. Jean laughed and said, "That was so long ago! We had mutual friends and Cookeville was so small then that everyone knew each other and we did a lot of things together -- church things and going to ball games."

"Jean's mother wouldn't let me date her unless I went to church with her, so that's what I did," said Bobby. "I had to go to church and MYF and church on Sunday night. We've both been members of the First United Methodist Church here for over 60 years."

After high school graduation, Jean went to the University of Tennessee-Memphis, to seek a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.

"My mother, being a college graduate, wanted me to have a college degree, and there weren't many nursing schools in Tennessee then that gave a B.S. degree. Being a state school, UT-Memphis was more affordable than Vanderbilt. Moving from a small town like Cookeville to a huge city like Memphis when I was 17 years old was very different. I had my 18th birthday the first week I was there.

"Bobby and I weren't dating at that time, but then we met in Memphis where he was in the University of Tennessee-Memphis Pharmacy School and reestablished our relationship. Bobby lacked six months finishing pharmacy school and I was a junior nursing student. He stayed in Memphis practicing pharmacy until I graduated in March of 1958. Then we returned to Cookeville."

Bobby was then 22 and started working for his father at West Side Drug Store.

"He made me a partner in 1959," he said. "After the downtown store closed, I operated Medical Center Pharmacy until 1996 and sold it to Eckerds. Mr. Farmer, a pharmacist who had worked for my dad before me, had been there for nearly 50 years, and we decided that when we closed the store, we'd go at the same time and turn the key in the lock."

Bobby worked as a part-time pharmacist for Eckerds Drug Company until 2001.

Meanwhile, Jean's nursing career spanned some 30 years.

"Well, I've done a little nursing in almost all of the specialty areas. When I got out of school, I worked a little at the hospital and then our first child, Kimberly Ann, was born in September 1958, and about three-and-a-half years later, our son, William Cecil Davis, came along."

Both of their children are pharmacists: Kim Morton lives in Knoxville and Bill Davis is in Franklin, Tennessee. They have four grandchildren: Matthew W. Morton, 21; Laura Ann Morton, 19; Tomas B. Davis, 14; and Coleman R. Davis, 10.

"In the early 60s, I started doing some part-time staff work at night in Cookeville's small hospital because the children were small and I knew Bobby could be at home from 11 p.m. until 7 a.m. We didn't have many doctors or available RNs," Jean explained. "Many times I was the only RN in the hospital, but there were several practical nurses and nursing assistants who worked every night."

From 1971 to 1972, Jean was clinical instructor of a practical nursing program at Cookeville General Hospital and began working at Cookeville High School as instructor for health occupations for five years.

"I took that job because it would be on a school schedule, the same as my children's," said Jean. "In 1973, I was employed at the Putnam County Health Department and that's where I spent most of my career. I was a staff nurse and later supervisor with more responsibility."

"By 1990, I was beginning to feel the pressure of so many programs. A supervising position at Tennessee Tech came open and I thought I would like to end my nursing career doing something less stressful," continued Jean. "So I went to Tennessee Tech as Director of Student Health Services until my retirement in December 1995. I enjoyed working with these young adults."

In 1985, Jean became the second woman to serve on the Cookeville General Hospital board of trustees. A female teacher had served a short time several years prior to 1985.

"I had no idea that the City Council would appoint me, but I accepted and served a full seven-year term. That was one of the hardest things I've ever done as far as community service," Jean recalled. "Change was coming and I just fell into the time frame when change was happening."

Jean finished her seven-year term on the hospital board to high praise from her colleagues and the



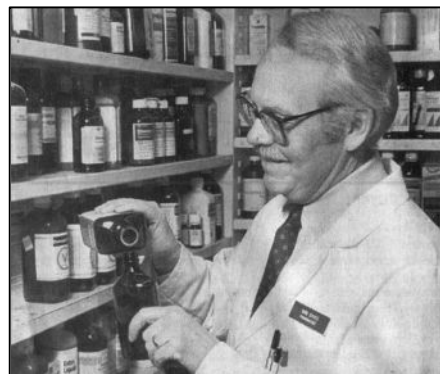
community in 1992. Mary Jo Denton wrote of her in a front-page story in the Herald-Citizen in July of 1992: "In addition to the hundreds and hundreds of meetings -- many of them tedious -- she has attended, she has also been instrumental in many of the major improvements to the hospital over the past few years. With the growth of services, that has grown to \$38 million . . . Almost single-handedly, she updated and modernized the boards and the medical staff's complex set of bylaws . . . she helped develop the detailed plans for the hospital's future growth."

**(Pictured:** Bobby and Jean Davis both served in the medical profession. Jean was an RN at Cookeville General Hospital and later became a clinical instructor of a practical nursing program at the hospital. She also served a seven-year term on the hospital board. Meanwhile, Bobby worked for his father at the West Side Drug Store before serving as a part-time pharmacist for Eckerds Drugs until 2001.

Jean gave three challenges as she left the board in 1992. She said, "To work for regionalization of health care offered by the hospital, to be an advocate for the people of this community and to insure a good atmosphere for the employees of the hospital."

In 1967, Bobby was elected mayor of Cookeville.

"I had never been to a city council meeting when I decided to run for the office and, much to my surprise, I was elected with the most votes and ended up being mayor," he said. "So, the first time I went to a council meeting, I had to conduct it."



"We were getting our water from Cookeville City Lake east of town then, and about a year after I took office, we had a drought and the lake went dry," continued Bobby. "We had to ask people not to wash their cars, not to use dishwashers or water flowers -- we just didn't have any water. The council made a tough decision to go to Center Hill Lake, which was very controversial at the time because it would raise the water bill and many people were against it. But we got the plant at Center Hill lake and it's provided us with an abundant water supply, and that has attracted industry to come here."

"I think the next year we got the Model Cities program," remembered Bobby. "There were 150 cities throughout the United States that were chosen to be a model city, and the cities chosen didn't have to have local funds to match federal funds. So with the Model Cities money we got the library and an addition to the hospital and a vocational school. With urban renewal, we did a part of the west side of Cookeville with streets, curbs and infrastructure. We bought the property for Cane Creek Park, but we didn't get it finished during my administration. Jean says we always stand on the shoulders of the ones who precede us. You may not be able to see the fruits of your labor, but somebody else will be able to finish it. I enjoyed being in on decisions that I thought were the best for the community.

Bobby has continued to be involved in the community. He is serving as President of Cookeville Regional Medical Center Foundation. He and Jean are also on the board of the Cookeville History Museum they are on different Chamber of Commerce committees.

"Something that I think has helped our community and the whole Upper Cumberland is the Tennessee Technological University School of Nursing," said Jean. "I have been privileged to serve on its Development Council since its inception in 1981. They can educate 100 nurses a year now in the new nursing school."

Jean also believes better psychiatric care is needed here.

"Plateau Mental Health Center has filled the void for years, but it's not enough. We had the Laurel Center at the hospital for a while, but it couldn't work because of financial issues," she said. "Mental illness is an illness just like diabetes or gallbladder disease and we have to keep working on ways to provide treatment. We have a crisis unit at Plateau now, and I understand it stays full all the time. Bobby and I are both on the Putnam County Health Council and one of the council's goals is to improve psychiatric care of our county."

When asked about influences on their lives, they each point to parents.

"I think of my mother being a single parent and raising two children by herself," said Jean. "When you go through those things, you learn character and you learn to push and keep going. So many people in this community have influenced me; I'd have a hard time choosing just one."

"I'm like Jean," said Bobby. "There's a combination of people here and we had so many good role models. Of course, one was my dad and my mother too, and I had some really good teachers."

Throughout their lives, they have done so much and meant so much to the community.

It's only fitting to paraphrase lines from the old Frank Sinatra song, "Love and Marriage." Bobby and Jean Davis "go together like a horse and carriage/This I tell you brother/You can't have one without the other."

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