

The Man...The Politician...The Statue...Our Friend

## *Honoring Ned*

A larger-than-life bronze statue stands on the courthouse lawn in Dresden, Tennessee in honor of one of Tennessee's best friends -- a man who grew up poor in Northwest Tennessee and never forgot where he came from; a man who played sports and went to college, only to drop out after problems with his knees made football impossible; a man that started out his business career as a low paid traveling shoe salesman and grew into a multi-millionaire. He was a big man...an honest man...and he loved the people around him. In 1968 he ran for a seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives so that he could serve the people of his community and his state. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Join WLJT as we take a look at this man who has touched the lives of every Tennessean – Governor Ned Ray McWherter – in HONORING NED. This production of WLJT-DT will air Monday, May 2 at 9:30 p.m. (also May 15 at 5:30 p.m. and May 31 at 8:30 p.m.) and focuses on the man as well as the politician. Most of all, it focuses on the friend we all knew and the unveiling of a statue in his honor on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in the fall of 2010.

McWherter loved to tell stories of growing up in rural Tennessee. He had a great sense of humor and a great love for everyone around him. It was this love of the people that moved him to first run for political office. He served in the Tennessee House of Representatives for eighteen years – fourteen of these as Speaker of the House – longer than anyone in Tennessee history. During these years he made a name for himself amongst his peers and his constituency. The next step in his career was inevitable.

McWherter ran for Governor of Tennessee in 1986 and was elected and then re-elected in 1990. McWherter's time as Governor is marked by many accomplishments: he enacted the 21st Century Schools education reform program to increase and more fairly distribute school funding across the state; he introduced a healthcare plan for the poor known as TennCare; he introduced his 95 County Job Plan that helped bring down the unemployment rate across the state; he built roads in Tennessee to help foster business development and prisons to keep Tennesseans safe. During his service, Tennessee was ranked twice as the nation's best fiscally managed state and in his last year as Governor, McWherter was named the best Governor in the country – something Tennesseans had known for quite some time.

After his service as Governor, McWherter returned to Northwest Tennessee and enjoyed spending time with his friends and family. Everyone knew him. Everyone loved him. But politics were still in his blood and he served as a mentor to many, including former President Bill Clinton, Congressman John Tanner, and Governor's Sundquist and Bredesen to name a few.

In 2009 the Ned Ray McWherter Monument Committee set out to raise funds to commission a statue in McWherter's honor. In keeping with McWherter's request, no public funds were to be used in producing the monument that today includes a statue, a granite foundation and a small courtyard plaza. The monument, sculpted by renowned Tennessee artist Russ Faxon, will be maintained by the Tennessee FFA Foundation and local high school agricultural students. McWherter was a former president of the Dresden FFA Chapter and a longtime supporter of the agricultural education organization.

Travel with us into the life of Governor Ned Ray McWherter. But, first, grab a cup of coffee and four vanilla wafers. After all, we're HONORING NED.