

Director Ermon Lature built 'foundation' of Williamson County Habitat

Former county Habitat executive director dies at 79

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FRANKLIN — When Ermon Lature became Habitat for Humanity of Williamson County's first full-time employee in 1996, the group had built exactly one home in the four years since it was founded.

When Mr. Lature retired as the group's executive director 12 years later, nearly 80 homes were finished.

On Christmas Day, Mr. Lature died in Franklin. He had collapsed at his family's home and was later pronounced dead at Williamson Medical Center, said his widow, Shirley Lature. He was 79.

Mr. Lature's peers credited him Tuesday with championing the need for more affordable homes for the county's working-class families during an era when Williamson County home prices grew steeply. The average price of a Habitat home is around \$120,000. In November, the average sale price of a Williamson home was \$423,206, records show.

If affordably priced housing has more traction here today, they said it's due largely to Mr. Lature's work.

"I don't think there are words to explain what he meant," said John Besser, who succeeded Mr. Lature as Habitat's executive director. "He took and built the foundation of the organization. He's the one that not only kept it going, but he grew it to build



(multiple) houses a year, and he pretty much established that single-handedly during this tenure.”

A native of Crofton, Ky., Mr. Lature served in the U.S. Army and worked for 38 years at AT&T. Shirley Lature said Mr. Lature frequently volunteered at Brentwood Baptist Church and at Graceworks Ministries.

“He wanted to do things for people,” Shirley Lature said, choking back emotion.

Mr. Lature was hired to lead Habitat in 1996 when it was an all-volunteer organization with few results. Besser was among the people who picked Mr. Lature to take the group further.

“He became the persona for Habitat (for Humanity) in Williamson County,” Besser said. “I think his strong faith was the basis for Habitat to expand.”

In the years since Mr. Lature’s retirement, Habitat grew its home total to 122 houses while other local nonprofit housing groups sprang up to add even more homes. Stephen Murray, executive director of Community Housing Partnership, considered Mr. Lature a mentor and friend.

“Ermon was such a sweet man,” Murray said. “There were a lot of things he pushed (the partnership’s) way when Habitat couldn’t do them. He was so helpful to me.”

Visitation will be 2-5 p.m. today, with the memorial service at 5 p.m. at Williamson Memorial Funeral Home. Memorials may be made to the Williamson County Habitat for Humanity or Brentwood Baptist Church Missions Fund.