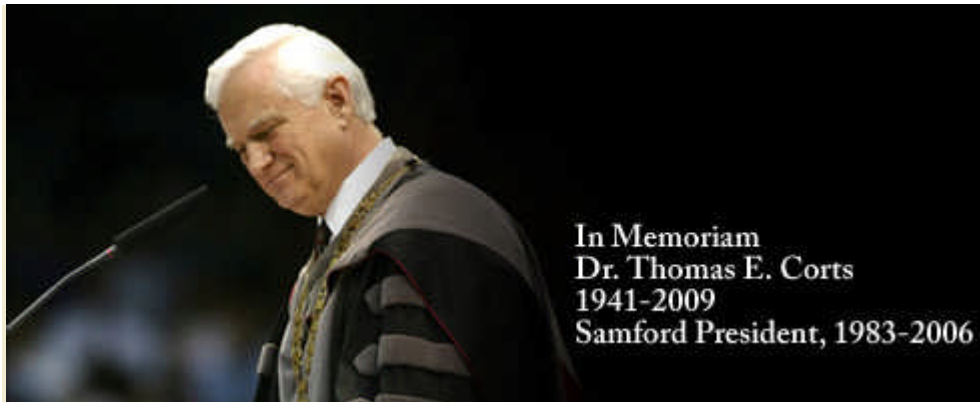


ACCR lost one of its most important heroes when Dr. Thomas Corts died.

Dr. Corts died February 4th, 2009, creating a huge loss for supporters of a new constitution for Alabama.



Here is what Former Governor Albert Brewer said:

"Thomas Corts was a multi-faceted individual, not only a great university administrator but a great citizen as well. He did so much to involve Samford University in the corporate community in Alabama and to help it meet its civic responsibility. I think the Alabama constitutional reform movement began with him, starting with his speech to the Birmingham Kiwanis Club in 1999. People went thinking they were going to hear a speech about Samford, but they came away knowing a great deal more about the need for constitutional reform in the state. And he carried that message all over Alabama. He was the consummate Renaissance man, and a wonderful family man. I have such great admiration for him."

Albert P. Brewer

Former Governor of Alabama

Former Professor, Samford University and Cumberland School of Law

Samford University Trustee

And a statement from Lenora Pate, Co-Chair of ACCR Inc.

"He was a quiet hero of faith and action who moved mountains while with us," said Lenora Pate, Co-Chair of ACCR Inc. "He now has joined that great cloud of witnesses, continuing to inspire us with his legacy of hope for a new constitution. We must never give up until his hopes and dreams for Alabama become reality!"

And a memory from long time associate and friend, Jack Brymer:

'Thick book' was Corts' brain child.

Thomas E. Corts was not only a remarkable administrator as president of Samford University, he was a master wordsmith and consummate communicator with a creative instinct. When he fired the first volley in the call for a new state of Alabama constitution, he used a visual of words to make his point. At his initiative and the assistance of Cumberland School of Law Professor Howard Walthall, the 1901 constitution with its 770-plus amendments was published creating a "thick" book. With the use of colors, the book conveyed the length of other state constitutions, including the U.S. Constitution. These documents combined consumed less than one-fourth of the total pages required to print Alabama's constitution. Sometime later, Lewis Lehe, a student at Homewood High School, used the graphic to create an award-winning DVD titled "It's a Thick Book."

Cort's Dream?

"... the people of Alabama one day may not ever know his (Corts)name but they will know something of the Father's love because of that new Constitution that will one day, one day bring equity and justice for all in our state."

Excerpted from the following paragraph by Dr. Roger Lovette at the Memorial Service on February 8, 2009 honoring Dr. Thomas E. Corts: "He (Corts) prayed a beautiful prayer at my retirement. The word master that he was—his prayer was beautiful and breathtaking. I remember one phrase even to this day. He prayed: 'We offer thanks for those who cannot remember his name...but remember Yours (Lord) because of him.' Dear Tom, I give your words back to you. For in the years to come students will walk across this campus and some may not know the name Tom Corts, but they will know the Father's name because of what he did here. And the people of Alabama one day may not ever know his name but they will know something of the Father's love because of that new Constitution that will one day, one day bring equity and justice for all in our state.

Here is what the newspapers said:

State loses constitution reform champ

Sunday, February 08, 2009 From the Birmingham News

Alabama has lost another great champion of constitution reform. Another passionate voice in the crusade to better the lives of all Alabamians by giving us a better foundation from which to govern ourselves has gone silent.

It is up to the rest of us to speak up, to keep alive the notion that our state can blossom if we free it from the shackles of a 1901 document designed to limit potential rather than nurture it.

Tom Corts, who died of an apparent heart attack on Wednesday, engaged some of the state's most influential leaders in the cause of constitution reform with his 1999 speech to the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham. In that talk, he blamed many of the state's ills on its outdated and ineffective constitution.

"If this state were our business - and if it is not, then whose is it? - we would demand that Alabama be turned around and fast," Corts told that crowd of business leaders. His remarks helped move the issue of reform from editorial boards to boardrooms around the state. Then Corts served as president of Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, a group that a decade later still is pushing to fix the basic law of the state.

With Corts' unexpected death at 67, the state has now lost three of its most prominent advocates for constitution reform. Respected for his long years of leadership as president of Samford University and for what Gov. Bob Riley called his "incredible integrity," Corts was the distinguished, establishment face of the movement.

Ron Casey, who was editorial page editor of The Birmingham News when he died of a heart attack in 2000, spoke for the ordinary Alabamians he loved in pushing reform. From a starting point of tax reform, an issue The News had pressed since 1988, Casey argued for a new constitution that would not only fix the tax inequities of the old law, but also lift the limitations it places on our people.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1991 for the editorials he and his team wrote about Alabama's taxes, Casey was 48 when he died.

Bailey Thomson, as editorial page editor of the Mobile Register and then a professor at the University of Alabama, was the scholar of constitution reform and the architect of the grass-roots strategy that created the ACCR. He died of a heart attack in 2003.

Thomson compiled the book on Alabama's constitutional history and drew the road map for citizen-based reform. He was 54 when he died.

Progress toward writing a new constitution has been heartbreakingly slow. We have made a few of the changes that reformers hoped would come along with fixing the constitution, such as income tax reforms that shifted some of the burden off our poorest citizens. We have not, however, replaced the flawed, old law itself.

We have also learned that often the fault is not in our laws, but in ourselves. A fundamental reform we hope to see is more home rule for the governments closest to the people. For that to work, as the

Jefferson County Commission reminds us almost every day, we have to elect the right people to office.

Still, the hope Corts and Casey and Thomson had for a state constitution that sets us up to thrive is one for which we all should strive. Tom Scarritt is editor of The News. E-mail: tscarritt@bhamnews.com.

A state leader is gone

The Huntsville Times

Saturday, February 07, 2009

Dr. Tom Corts was a major figure in constitutional reform

Alabama lost a leader this week. Dr. Tom Corts of Birmingham, age 67, died of a heart attack.

If you hadn't heard of Tom Corts, here's a refresher.

Corts served as president of Birmingham's Samford University for 23 years, from 1983 to 2006. During his tenure, the school's endowment increased from \$8 million to about \$250 million and its enrollment rose to 4,500.

But Corts' influence was broader than Samford. He was a founder of the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, an organization for which he was chairman emeritus at the time of his death.

To ACCR, Corts brought vision, determination and a sense that the people of Alabama deserved a better fundamental law than the massive and antiquated Constitution of 1901.

Corts didn't stop there. Upon his retirement from Samford, he took over as chancellor for the state's embattled two-year college system. He launched investigations and instituted reforms.

Corts was not a man afraid to state his opinions. In early 2007, he said he believed the state's two-year colleges needed a governing board separate from the Alabama State Board of Education. Some board members didn't like Corts' comments, and he resigned rather than get caught up in internal squabbling.

Most recently, Corts supervised President George W. Bush's International Educational Initiative, a five-year campaign aimed at providing a basic education to 4 million children in Africa and Central America.

Corts and his wife, Maria, to whom he had been married 44 years, returned home to Birmingham from Washington in January. In addition to his widow, Corts is survived by two daughters, a son and six grandchildren.

Upon his death, officials at ACCR urged the Legislature to honor Corts by allowing state voters to decide whether they wished to call a constitutional convention. (For more information on the issue, visit www.constitutionalreform.org.) - John Ehinger.

From the Montgomery Advertiser:
Op-ed on Dr. Thomas Corts
Special to the Montgomery Advertiser

You might ask how Dr. Thomas Corts' life impacted Alabama. You could more correctly ask, how his life impacted Alabama and the world. He influenced so many students, faculty, staff, community leaders and politicians in this state, many of whom went on to serve in other states and even other countries. He influenced all whose lives he touched.

"He was the consummate Renaissance Man," said former Governor Albert Brewer. He involved Samford University in the corporate community in Alabama. He involved the students in the larger world during the 23 years he served as the President of Samford University.

He initiated the idea of the need for a research-based think tank and enlisted former Gov. Brewer to lead the creation of the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama known as PARCA and housed it at Samford. This think tank researches and provides reports on subjects critical to the lives of citizens and growth of this state.

He is responsible for the largest period of growth at Samford University. Under his leadership an international study center was established in London, England, 30 new buildings were constructed on campus, the endowment grew and student enrollment grew by 15 percent.

Several of his students said he changed their lives. A former student said she worked with families from many states other than Alabama and loved hearing stories of how they had heard about Samford. She was grateful to Dr. Corts who, she said, led "Samford from a regional liberal arts college to a nationally-recognized research university." And, she added, the "world is better for it".

Those who worked with him said he was a great visionary and leader and that his legacy is profound. Called a visionary leader, he was said by one community leader to be, "the most intelligent and eloquent man I ever met."

Governor Riley said of Corts, "His imprint on the state will last forever."

Known for his ability to bring peoples of different views and backgrounds together, his brilliance was disarming to critics said former Governor Brewer.

He influenced all whom he met, as President of Samford, Chairman of the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), President of the American Association of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities and President of Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform.

He was tapped by Gov. Riley to lead the troubled two-year college system out of some financial and ethical problems. He began the effort of transparency and ethical leadership in the two-year system that continues today under Bradley Byrne.

Most recently, Dr. Corts served as Coordinator of Basic Education in the Office of the Director of Foreign Assistance, U.S. State Department, providing aid and touching the lives of four million school children in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Liberia, Mali and Yemen.

He tackled problems of governance in Alabama, particularly the grip of the 1901 Constitution on the State. He called the document archaic and convoluted, concentrating power in Montgomery and blamed it for the foundation of a tax system that falls heavily on the poor and produces erratic booms and busts of revenue. From his speeches and the leadership of the late Bailey Thomson, Professor of Journalism at the University of Alabama, grew the establishment of the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform (ACCR) which Corts led as he traveled the state describing the problems that the Constitution creates.

"He was a quiet hero of faith and action who moved mountains while with us," said Lenora Pate, Co-Chair of ACCR Inc. "He now has joined that great cloud of witnesses, continuing to inspire us with his legacy of hope for a new constitution. We must never give up until his hopes and dreams for Alabama become reality!"

His legacy is furthered by a Mock Convention being sponsored by the ACCR Foundation and held the weekend of February 14th and 15th in Prattville. It is an effort to show the state that citizen delegates can sit down together and rewrite the troublesome 1901 Constitution.

And to further that legacy, Joint Resolutions sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem, Demetrius Newton and Senator Ted Little will be introduced in the Alabama Legislature on Tuesday, February 10th.

These Resolutions ask that the people of this State be allowed to vote on whether or not to call for a constitutional convention that will allow the people to write a new constitution for Alabama.

The organization he started together with the late Bailey Thomson, continues to draw members and educate the citizens on the need for a new constitution.

As Governor Riley said, Dr. Corts' "impact on the state will last forever". And that goes for his impact on all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

Nancy Ekberg, Communications Chair for Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform (ACCR Inc.) Resources for this piece were provided by Jack Brymer, long-time associate and friend of Dr. Corts.