

Swain asked: 'What can I do to help you and Scott County?'

By DWIGHT MURPHY FNB Guest Columnist

Most Scott Countians fail to realize William H. Swain was not born or even raised in this county. He was a “northern transplant” that came and stayed because he loved the county, and he loved our people. He chose us and became a part of the very fabric of Scott Countians’ lives because of the vision he has had for this to become a better place to work, raise our families, and grow old in.

One of the first calls I received after being elected county executive in 1982 was from Bill Swain. He said, “What can I do to help you and what can I do to help Scott County?” . . . And this has been his standard statement to me for the past twenty-two years. We met with leaders from the State of Tennessee and local citizens in those early weeks of my first term at his “Guest House,” and laid out the things this county needed and a vision for the future. The unemployment rate was over 20% in 1982, and there was little hope for jobs in the near term. Bill was the “catalyst” to help the county and a young, inexperienced county executive define the highest priority needs for a community that needed so much. Jobs were first priority with better education for our people, a close second. We also realized we needed safe drinking water for our citizens and decent roads to get products in and out of the area.

That early 1982 meeting convened by Bill Swain at the “Guest House” set the list of goals and priorities that has led this county forward for the past two decades and produced so many accomplishments.

In Bill’s vision, jobs and education were intertwined and could not be separated. He believed that better educational facilities and better equipped and trained teachers were the key ingredients to having better jobs. Bill knew technology was going to outpace skill levels and he was telling everyone that would listen that we must do a better job educating our people. He devoted his time both on the local level and on the state level to encourage quality education.

Bill has always supported education for all children whether they are in the Scott County School System or the Oneida School System. His idea of “mini-grants” has helped many teachers obtain the supplies needed that the school system could not provide. These mini-grants caused teachers to compete for grant dollars and to think “outside the box.” The creative ideas generated by the grant applications have been shared throughout the school system and have been the stimuli for innovative quality education and fun learning.

Bill believed that if a college education could be brought closer to home to Scott County, more of our people could receive post-secondary training. He became the personal missionary and



Figure 1 - Dwight Murphy - Scott County Mayor

crusader for the local Roane State campus. After giving the property to the local campus, he has been on a continual one-man crusade to successfully raise the funds to build the new state-of-the-art science lab, the following year the student center, and this past summer the library expansion. He personally labored to build the soccer field out of an old strip area on the campus. All of this was done without fanfare or accolades for Bill Swain. He just saw a need and set out to fix it the “Bill Swain way,” by personal hard work and getting his friends and neighbors involved.

Bill is always available to help with our industrial prospects and does it without any desire for praise or self-gain. If a prospect will provide good jobs for the people of Scott County, I can always count on Bill to help any way he can. He has helped me host more visiting potential industrial people than I can even start to count. The county has used his “Guest House” for lodging and entertainment of visiting industrial guests over the last 20-plus years. This is always at no expense to the county and with Bill and Tomilee Swain wanting no credit, and always acting as gracious hosts.

Bill was a charter member of the Chamber of Commerce. I was pleased to see him honored at the recent meeting that celebrated the 50-year anniversary of the Chamber. He has helped many young entrepreneurs with an idea and no money to realize their dream of owning a new business. In many cases he has had to give financial advice, legal advice, and a shoulder to cry on as businesses go through the day-to-day trials that are always part of growth. Bill has always been there to help and encourage local businesses to expand and upgrade. In addition to this, Bill was involved in the creation of utility districts for water as well as the telephone because he knew the county could not grow without the proper utilities. He also believed every family deserved these utilities in their homes no matter where they lived in Scott County.

Health care has always been important to Bill Swain. He was a founding member of the Scott County Hospital Board. He has served on the Saint Mary’s Board of Directors for many years, and even today he has a keen interest in improved health care for all Scott Countians.

Few people have given so much and expected so little in return as Bill Swain. He has never wanted public praise or press for the community services that he gave so freely from the heart. He has wanted to leave Scott County a better place than he found it. His fingerprints are on education, health care, utility expansion, roads, industries, businesses, and many other facets of Scott County life. I am thankful for the good counsel and advice Bill Swain has given me as I try to serve the people of Scott County. Bill has changed my life and the lives of all Scott Countians because he really cares. I know if I call Bill tomorrow he will ask, “What can I do to help you and what can I do to help Scott County?” Then he will act on the task I give him without hesitation or reservation.

William H. Swain, I speak on behalf of myself as well as all Scott Countians to give a much deserved “thank you” for a man who moved here, stayed, and became one of us. You have made a difference!