



ELGIN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE ELGIN, TEXAS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

LOCAL HISTORIANS MEMORIALIZED

The EOHP and the City of Elgin honored Sydna Arbuckle and T. Berry at the Veterans Memorial Park amphitheater on October 11.

These well-known preservationists of Elgin history passed away in 2024 after years of service to the community and participation in EOHP.



In attendance were Coach Berry's daughter, Demita Huntley, and her daughter, Laura, as well as his siblings and other relatives. Mrs. Arbuckle's daughter, Ronda Kirk, and her family were also present, along with her sister, Judy Davis.



Participants in the ceremony noted the stories shared by these Elgin natives through their research and writing. Two crepe myrtle trees were planted, and plaques were placed to memorialize the contributions of these dedicated historians.

The *Elgin Courier* reported in its November 5 edition that "the plantings were chosen as both a literal and symbolic connection between the late Elginites and the city they loved."

"The crepe myrtles symbolize the broad roots that people in the community have," EOHP Board Member Deborah Cartwright said. "I think it's a wonderful representation of what Elgin offers as far as cultural roots, beauty, and growth."



ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS TO JOIN BOARD IN 2026

Lillian moved to Elgin as the world welcomed the 21st century, together with her late husband, Bruce Stewart Gates. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a B.S. in Home Economics, concentrating in Nutrition and Child Development. She also obtained a master's degree in Nutrition from the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio.

Lillian lives by the principle that one must know one's family history, values, education, and sense of purpose in order to have a quality life and contribute to one's community. Locally, Lillian is a member of the Elgin Arts Association, Elgin Garden Club, Friends of the Elgin Library, Elgin Historical Association, and the Elgin Oral History Project.

Lillian is a weekly volunteer docent at the Elgin Depot Museum. On a statewide level, she serves on the Executive Board of the Texas Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics Foundation. Lillian served as President of the Austin Dietetics Association from 2001–2002 and as President of the Texas Dietetic Association from 2003–2004. She fully retired in 2017 as Special Projects Manager and Chief Dietitian with the Quality Monitoring Program, a program she founded.



LILLIAN LUIS REYES-GATES



HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE?

Visit <https://oralhistoryetx.org/> and explore the rich history and culture of Elgin, Texas and its impact on our lives today.

ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS TO JOIN BOARD IN 2026

Charlotte Swenson grew up in the Kimbro area, as did her parents. Her family moved from Kimbro to Elgin in 1971. She graduated from Elgin High School in 1976 and started her education in the medical field as a radiologic technologist. She worked for an orthopedic group in Austin and in 1986 completed her education to become a radiation therapist. She worked as a radiation therapist for over 27 years. The last five years of that career were spent as a traveling radiation therapist. She retired from that field in 2012 and started teaching x-ray physics at the College of Health Care Professions. She retired from full-time teaching in March 2025 and is now teaching part-time.

She had a son, Jacob Maynard, who was born in 1984 and tragically died in a car accident in 2014. She met Tim Fender from Missouri in 2004, and they married in 2014. She has one sister, Jan Swenson. She was one of the original Hogeys organizers and was a volunteer for many years. She is co-founder of the Grow Elgin Project, a networking group for local folks. She also started the sMall Mall, an event that allows kids to select gifts for their family members free of charge.



CHARLOTTE SWENSON

Her hobbies include anything related to homesteading, and she is the proud producer of "Ears to Ya" cornbread mix. She is excited to serve on the Elgin Oral History Board and is looking forward to preserving the wonderful history of our town.

*Tell Us
=YOUR=
Story*

INTERESTING IN VOLUNTEERING?

Do you know an Elgin story that should be preserved? Are you interested in recording the history of our beloved city?

Contact us! We'd love to work with you!

ADDITIONAL DIRECTORS TO JOIN BOARD IN 2026

Byron Mitchell is a dedicated community leader and public servant residing in Elgin, Texas. A proud 1980 graduate of Elgin High School, Byron has deep roots in the community he continues to serve with passion and commitment.

Byron enjoyed a successful 28-year career with Abbott/Hospira Inc. before retirement, and currently works with the Texas Department of Public Safety.

His commitment to public service extends well beyond his professional life. He serves as President of the Elgin ISD Board of Trustees, where he helps shape the future of education for local students, and as President of the Elgin Juneteenth Organization, preserving and celebrating an important part of the community's heritage. Byron is also an active member of the MLK Holiday Commission.

Faith and family are central to Byron's life. He is a Deacon and founding member of Strait Gate Fellowship Baptist Church.

Byron was married to the late Winnie Milligan Mitchell and is the proud father of three children—Byron, Brent, and Jessica—and "Paw Paw" to his grandson, Nyles Mitchell.



BYRON MITCHELL

In his spare time, Byron enjoys singing and spending quality time with family and friends, always finding joy in the connections that matter most.



"ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS ALLOW US TO DOCUMENT AND CHRONICLE PEOPLE'S STORIES; STORIES THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE NOT BE INCLUDED IN THE HISTORICAL RECORD."

-PATRICIA LEAVY

NEW ORAL HISTORIES ADDED

Interviewing The People of Elgin

The Elgin Oral History Project is all about capturing the voices and stories that make Elgin unique—past, present, and what's still unfolding. Through interviews at local events like the Farmers Market, we're preserving not just history, but the everyday experiences that shape our community. In this video, filmed and produced by Story With Video, Board members Molly Owen and Bob Makela talk with vendors and visitors at the 2025 Elgin Farmers Market.



In 2025, EOHP added two live interviews to its YouTube channel. One was a series of brief interviews of vendors and participants in the Elgin Farmers' Market conducted by EOHP directors Bob Makela and Molly Owen. The interviews were collected in a documentary video format to showcase the community's support and involvement in the weekly market.

The other interview was a podcast featuring Byron Mitchell, the president of Elgin Independent School District's Board of Trustees. Mr. Makela conducted the interview. Mr. Mitchell provided insight into his life and the City of Elgin. This real-time interview is offered on YouTube and marks the beginning of more podcasts in 2026 to bring the history of the area to interested listeners.

2025 EOHP BOARD MEMBERS

Karen Bernstein
Sonia Browder
Deborah Cartwright
Bob Makela
Tracy Ortiz
Molly Owen
Ruby Simms
John Smith
Andrea Taylor

Contact Us!

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YouTube:

[@ElginTXOralHistoryProject](https://www.youtube.com/ElginTXOralHistoryProject)



OTHER VIDEOS PRODUCED BY EOHP CAN BE FOUND ON ITS YOUTUBE CHANNEL AT:

[HTTPS://YOUTUBE.COM/ELGINTXORALHISTORYPROJECT](https://youtube.com/ElginTXOralHistoryProject)
#TELLUSYOURSTORY#ELGINTX#ETX