

S. TRUETT CATHY, 1921-2014

TIM ECHOLS

How Truett Cathy changed a young person's life



Echols serves on the Georgia Public Service Commission.

When I was 17 years old, I met Truett Cathy at a Rotary Club meeting where I received a certificate for my high school leadership achievements. Mr. Cathy spent some time with me that day. In fact, he gave me a set of Zig Ziglar tapes, a tape recorder and a promise to put me to work for Chick-fil-a if I would go on to college and graduate. That I did, in Athens at our flagship university, but something happened along the way.

I listened to those tapes, served my fellow students in various capacities, and set some goals. One of those goals was to become a statewide elected official. Upon graduation, I went back to Mr. Cathy's office, did the interview, got the offer – but turned down the opportunity to run a Chick-fil-A store in Texas because of my desire to enter Georgia politics one day.

Many years passed. We started a family – and it grew, and grew, and grew. I started a nonprofit, and it did the same – growing to almost 40 states. I helped candidates, wrote op-eds and even authored a book. And then one day in 2010, an opportunity presented itself, with Robert Baker deciding not to seek re-election for a fourth term on the Georgia Public Service Commission. That moment that Truett Cathy helped prepare me for was finally a reality.

I was fortunate to get my party's nomination after a difficult primary and primary run-off battle. Then, with the wind at my back, we won the general election. I went back to Mr. Cathy that first year and thanked him for his challenge and mentorship – albeit it through cassette tapes. The result was still the same – a changed life. Something, it turns out, that he did with literally thousands of young people like me.

Truett Cathy lived a life of vision

and purpose. He successfully built a business that people usually feel fortunate to work for, and he transmitted his values continually – even through serving fried chicken. He was focused on young people, and knew how to assess character and potential. He was not afraid to challenge a person, and certainly not afraid to give his money away.

We'll miss Truett, but his legacy lives on through the many lives he has touched.



SPECIAL

Truett Cathy.

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