

Citizen of the Year



James Benton Miller: Some trivial, some not, but all to be done.

Common good results from united effort, and common good can range the gamut from university buildings to a Boy Scout circus.

“WE MUST REMEMBER,” said the tall, graying man, “that a city exists for the sole purpose of creating a favorable climate in which to live, work and rear our children.”

It is this attitude which has guided many of the efforts of James B. Miller, '34ba, '34 Law, and which was partially responsible for the latest honor bestowed upon the lawyer and 1957 president of the Shawnee Chamber of Commerce. At a meeting of the Shawnee Kiwanis Club, Miller was chosen the city's Citizen of the Year and presented an engraved silver pitcher, symbol of the coveted award.

No one deserved it more. Phrases such as “outstanding contribution to the community,” “superlative job in reorganization and redirection (of the Chamber of Commerce),” “personal character and ability,” and “conspicuous service” were on many tongues and in many publications eager to tell Miller of the mass appreciation due him.

Married and the father of two, Miller

finds his interest in civic affairs goes back 20 years. In 1938 he became co-chairman of the Canadian Valley Boy Scout circus, and ever since he's been going strong in community work. He became president of Shawnee's Rotary Club and is today a member of its board of directors. He helped in Red Cross, Salvation Army and YMCA projects, became president of the Pott County and Shawnee Bar Associations, has helped to direct several local business organizations, and was a vestryman for the Episcopal Church.

When Oklahoma Baptist University needed new buildings, Miller took the post of fund chairman; the fund was oversubscribed, setting an all-time high for the institution's construction drives. When Shawnee's Jonco Plant desperately needed additional airport buildings, Miller set up a brand new manner of financing them, and they materialized.

Born in Tulsa in 1910, he graduated from high school there and then came to O. U.

to study law. Meeting tuition fees wasn't easy, and Miller worked as kitchen boy in a fraternity house. Later he was employed by the University's Extension Division, where he worked under Ted Beard, who later became executive secretary of the Alumni Association. Miller was a member of the Ruf-Neks, was director of Soonerland Follies (predecessor of Sooner Scandals), and was active in track, although he termed himself “just fair” in the latter.

After graduation he married Mary Wilson in Shawnee. Soon he was called into World War II service with the FBI. He is now immediate past president of the O. U. Law School Association.

What makes Shawnee's Citizen of the year tick?

“Common good results from united effort,” said Miller. “Personal gain cannot solve our problems . . . Some of these (community) tasks are trivial, and some are of great importance. But all must be accomplished if the end is to be realized.”