

# Obituary: Vernon Dee Stokes

September 17, 2024

**Vernon Dee Stokes** of Midland, longtime public educator and trustee of Wayland Baptist University, died Sept. 14. He was 85. He was born Jan. 1, 1939, in Arch, N.M., to Scott Smith Stokes and Alma Rachel Copeland Stokes. He lived his early years in eastern New Mexico until his family relocated to Sundown, where his father worked in the oilfield. After graduating from Sundown High School, he went to college at Wayland Baptist College, where he graduated in 1959. At Wayland, he met Belva Ramsey, and they married Nov. 1, 1958. Stokes' career in public education spanned 40 years. He was first a classroom teacher and coach, then a high school administrator. He received his master's degree in 1966 and his doctorate in education from Texas Tech in 1970. He worked as a consultant at West Texas Education Center in Midland—later Region 18 Education Service Center—before becoming assistant superintendent for the Burleson Independent School District. In 1981, he became deputy director and later executive director of Region 18. When he retired from that role in 1996, he almost immediately was called to serve as interim superintendent of Ector County Independent School District. He finished his years in public education in 2001 as superintendent of schools at Ector County ISD. His commitment to higher education was lived out through his longtime support of Wayland Baptist University. He served on Wayland's board of trustees for 19 years and chaired the board for three years. "Dr. Stokes was a beacon of leadership and a pillar of the Wayland family," said Wayland President Donna Hedgepath. "His profound impact on education and his unwavering dedication to serving others embody the values we hold dear at Wayland. We are deeply grateful for his numerous contributions



and his enduring legacy.” Wayland named Stokes as Distinguished Alum for Leadership in 1987, and he received the Keeper of the Flame Award in 2015. He was named Wayland’s Distinguished Alumni Benefactor in 2019, and he received the President’s Award in 2022 and the Distinguished Alumni Award in 2024. Beginning when he was a teenager, Stokes led music and served in other staff positions at various churches. He taught Sunday school more than 60 years, and he was a deacon. He served the Baptist General Convention of Texas as a member of the Christian Education Coordinating Board. He was preceded in death by daughters Shelly Stokes Coll and Shauna Stokes Sanderson and by a great-granddaughter. He is survived by his wife of nearly 66 years, Belva; son Shane Stokes and wife Kim; son Shannon Stokes and wife Kimberly; 15 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and four sisters. A memorial service is scheduled at 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 20 at First Baptist Church in Midland. Memorial gifts can be given to Ezekiel Department Benevolence Fund at [First Baptist Church](#), [InStep Ministry](#) or the [Stokes Endowed Scholarship at Wayland Baptist University](#).