

Hall of Fame Write Up:

Hall of Fame: Harvey Honore

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Thirty-one years after my father's death I still have people come up to me and tell me how kind and good a man he was," says Harvey Honoré Jr. "I've never had one of them say anything that wasn't positive. I never really saw him get upset about anything. He handled everything that came his way with patience and compassion."

Until his death at 52, general contractor Harvey Honoré Sr. was one of Baton Rouge's most active and beloved civic leaders, a self-made businessman, husband and father of seven with a reputation for fairness and generosity.

"He taught us about honesty and integrity, and his work ethic was outstanding," says the younger Honoré, who had been working at the family business for about 10 years when his father died. "Even though he only had 52 years on earth, he accomplished more than most people who live to be a lot older."



Honoré rose to be a respected commercial contractor with a high-profile portfolio, but his beginnings were humble. His first job in the industry was as a brick mason apprentice working for two uncles who were general contractors. In 1953 he felt the itch to go out on his own and began working as a masonry contractor. Then in 1958, he began a residential contracting business, starting first with spec houses and later moving to large, specialty projects. With a solid reputation as a residential builder, Honoré decided to go exclusively into commercial construction in 1971.

“He was ahead of his time,” recalls the eldest son. “He wanted to do the best job possible, and he looked forward to the challenge of commercial work.”

His first year in the commercial business, Honoré was awarded the contract to build the industrial arts building at Baton Rouge High School. It was quickly followed by the student union at Catholic High School and renovation projects for Goudchaux’s Department Store on Main Street. Honoré Construction completed the interior framing for Cortana Mall and renovated the American Bank building, the AC Lewis YMCA and other large-scale projects in Baton Rouge.

“It was a time when Baton Rouge was just starting to become the city that it is today,” says Honoré Jr. “There was a lot of growth and change.”

Honoré had the ability to find and keep reliable workers and to complete jobs on time. His son recalls that Honoré believed customers always remembered how you finished a job.

“He said it was important to start strong, but that it was even more important to finish strong, and that that really affected your credibility,” says Honoré Jr.

Son-in-law Rhaoul Guillaume, who founded the engineering firm Gotech in 1981, recalls Honoré’s powerful influence and gentle demeanor.

“He was a wise man. He had so much common sense,” Guillaume says. “I’ve tried to model my business after the way he ran his, especially how he treated people.”

As prolific as his professional work was, Honoré also was known for tireless civic engagement. He served on numerous community boards, including the Chamber of Commerce, the American Red Cross, Junior Achievement, the East Baton Rouge Parish Mortgage Authority, the Boys Club, Camp Fire USA, the Speech and Hearing Foundation and the Safety Council.

A devout Catholic, he was actively involved in the churches in which he was a member, first St. Agnes and later St. Jude. He was member of the Knights of Columbus Council 969 and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and he was named a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, a Papal honor bestowed to a small number of recipients within a Catholic diocese. He once

participated in a mission to Guatemala, donating money to help build medical clinics and the local parsonage.

“No matter who you were, rich or poor, it did not matter to him,” recalls his oldest daughter, Geretta Honoré Guillaume. “He made you feel welcome. He made you feel important.”

Honoré was the 1980-81 recipient of the Golden Deeds Award by the Baton Rouge Inter-Civic Council. In addition to his extensive board work, he had taken it upon himself to buy and fix up 11 houses in the inner city, allowing impoverished families to live in them rent-free. He also used his personal resources to rehabilitate dozens of other properties for low-income Baton Rouge residents.

Honoré’s death occurred just days before the company was set to start on a major construction project for St. Michael’s Catholic Church. Three of his four sons, Harvey, Brent and Dexter, were working for the family business at the time and picked up the torch for their father, recalls Honoré Jr.

“It was stressful, but with the grace of God we did it, and we finished seven days ahead of schedule,” he says.

As their own families grew, the four Honoré brothers each formed their own separate businesses. All seven siblings and Honoré’s widow, Betty, live in Baton Rouge and remain close. They gather frequently, especially for the holidays, says Geretta Honoré Guillaume.

“It’s a tribute to my dad,” she says. “He and my mom always put family first.”