

News

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SPECIAL TO THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON ALUMNI OFFICE

DALLAS--May and June were important months for Robert Tubbs, television studio operations manager for the health science center. On May 27, the Soroptimist International of Dallas presented Robert with the Faye Ross Memorial Hurdle Award. Given biennially for more than 25 years, the award honors a "physically handicapped Dallas area person who 'hurdled' the obstacle to become a productive member of society."

Robert was again honored June 3 when a phone call from the Texas Rehabilitation Commission informed him that he is Outstanding Handicapped State Employee of the year. Selected from applicants from all over the state, Robert is to be cited by Gov. William Clements in August for "demonstrating by example the capabilities of the handicapped" and "serving as an inspiration to others with his courage and initiative."

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first add Robert Tubbs

The profession of television operations is considered demanding, even for those with no physical handicaps; rapid decision making and split-second timing are necessary for camera work, editing and overall production. Robert Tubbs, Television Operations Manager at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, continues to rise in this demanding profession despite a serious congenital deformity of his upper limbs.

Yet for Robert, born without the service of normal arms, hands or fingers, his condition is not a disabling deformity. Over the years he has learned not only the simple tasks we take for granted--lighting a cigarette, writing, handling a knife and fork--but also the complex manipulations required by a professional television cameraman, editor and production supervisor.

Born on June 30, 1944, in Beaumont, Texas, Robert attended Crozier Technical High School in Dallas, where he participated in student government, and photo and radio clubs. Later, at The University of Texas at Arlington, Robert majored in radio and television, giving him the opportunity to produce and host his own regular radio program on KPCN. He was also active in theatre productions.

In November of 1965, and for the next seven years, Robert worked for KERA Television, Channel 13, Dallas. During his tenure at KERA, he progressed from videotape and "on air" control operator, to instructional television design coordinator. Subsequently, he accepted the position of assistant director for the popular "Newsroom" program.

In 1972, Robert joined the Health Science Center as Technical Staff Assistant III and was promoted to television director in 1974. With another promotion

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second add Robert Tubbs

to Studio Operations Manager, Robert accepted the responsibility for planning and maintaining studio schedules and for assigning equipment and personnel for all television productions at the Health Science Center. (The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas maintains a very active, full color, broadcast-quality television system. Programs produced here are shown nationwide.)

Robert's success in his field, especially at KERA and the Health Science Center, is a matter of public record. Programs he has produced and employees he has trained bear out his ability to overcome what few people have ever had to contend with.

But the side of Robert Tubbs that is not on public view is a family life in which he and his wife have devoted themselves to adopting and caring for handicapped children.

In 1970, while he was still single, Robert happened to meet a young boy named Charlie. A serendipitous meeting--urged by Charlie's parents, who were sure Robert could counsel their handicapped son--the friendship began as a simple sharing of problems. The older Robert, with a lifetime of dealing with his disability, listened to and encouraged the younger Charlie, just beginning to confront the same problems for the first time; their commonality was both physical and emotional.

The friendship between the two became strong. Robert helped Charlie answer questions like, "What do you say to kids who come up to you and tease you about your hands?" and, "Where do you draw the line on letting people help you do things?"

As a result of their bond, Charlie learned through Robert things he couldn't have from any other counselor. When they were both a bit older, Robert took a wife and Charlie served as "ring bearer." It was his experiences with

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Charlie that inspired Robert to become heavily, personally involved with handicapped children.

Today, Robert and his wife, Zerita, have adopted three children and are in the process of taking a fourth. Of the four, three children are severely handicapped. They also serve as foster parents for a fifth child and have been foster parents for over a dozen others.

The Tubbs' three adopted children are Betsy, 8 and twins Michael and Christie, 5. Betsy, who wears leg braces and is confined to a wheelchair, has spina bifida and is hydrocephalic (born with an open spine and water on the brain). She is paralyzed from the waist down. Robert explains that Betsy's attitude has improved since coming into the family. Both he and Zerita try to give the kids a sense of their own independence. Whenever Betsy becomes flustered while trying to accomplish a task, Robert calms her and insists she should stop, consider the situation, and try to find another way to figure out the problem.

In his own life, this has been an overriding philosophy.

Following the adoption of Betsy, Robert and Zerita placed their application for a physically handicapped boy with the Department of Human Resources. They wanted a boy and felt it would be a good addition to Betsy's life. As a result of their application, the Tubbs' took the twins, Michael and Christie. Although Michael is not handicapped in any way, Christie has cerebral palsy, an undeveloped eye retina and is hydrocephalic. She has undergone surgery to assist her in walking.

A fourth handicapped child has been placed in the Tubbs' care, but due to excessive medical costs, they cannot afford to legally adopt her. Harriet, age 16, has severe cerebral palsy which affects her right side. She has poor balance

fourth add Robert Tubbs

and difficulty swallowing her food. Although she cannot legally be a part of the family, she will continue to be a permanent member of the Tubbs' family nonetheless.

A fifth child, Edward, is a Mexican-American youngster who Robert and Zerita are in the process of adopting. Although he has no physical handicap, Edward is the victim of a very difficult life. The Tubbs are providing him love, care and the emotional security he has not had before.

Robert credits his parents for helping him develop his abilities and independence. He admits that it's difficult for him to take the same position with his own children (even teaching the simplest task can cause frustration and pain for both parent and child) but he realizes that his parents' insight in pushing him proved invaluable in his development.

Robert Tubbs has overcome the problems of being a handicapped person in a "normal" world. His strong desire to persevere has enabled him to rise in his field and become a respected television professional. But perhaps more importantly, Robert has used his experience with a handicap to take children into his home and love and care for them. He is concerned that as many handicapped children as possible learn how to take their place in the world, without shame or fear. By all accounts, he is very successful in everything he does.

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