

George Tall Chief, former Osage Nation leader, dies at 96

MEGHAN DRAKE World Staff Writer | Posted: Sunday, August 18, 2013
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George Tall Chief understood what it meant to be a leader at a young age.

The former Osage chief took care of four younger brothers after his father was murdered in the "Reign of Terror," a time in the Osage Nation's history where numerous murders took place over the nation's oil wealth.

He went on to take leadership positions that had an impact on more than just the Osage people. He was an athlete, educator, coach and chief.

George Tall Chief was chief from 1982-1990 and was one of the early advocates for the adoption of a three-branch government system. He died Aug. 11 at the age of 96.

A memorial service will take place at 10 a.m. Saturday at Gray Horse Chapel in Fairfax.

His son, Tim Tall Chief, said people tell him how his father has changed their lives without trying.

"He just had a natural leadership skill," he said. "When he walked into the room, everybody stood up."

After George Tall Chief's father died, the five Tall Chief boys were sent to military school. A football scholarship to Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College began his passion for athletics.

He was a Golden Glove boxing champion for two years in a row and a member of the National Appaloosa Horse Club.

Tim Tall Chief said his dad's athleticism was renowned and he receives occasional reminders. He said an Edmond man told him, "Your dad hit me harder than I've ever been hit in my life."

After receiving his bachelor's and master's degrees in education, George Tall Chief taught history and coached football, wrestling and baseball.

"He loved kids and he loved teaching," Tim Tall Chief said. "History was his passion."

He was most passionate about teaching the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government, something that influenced his belief in a three-branch system in the Osage Nation.

During his 50 years in education, he taught and coached in Oklahoma, Oregon and Idaho. As superintendent at the Fort Belknap reservation, he helped the Assiniboine Tribe secure \$5.5 million to build charter schools.

Following his two terms as Osage Nation chief, he served as president on the first Osage National Council.

He was inducted into the National Native American Hall of Fame and received the Peace Chief Award.

Tim Tall Chief said his father was a man of many accomplishments. Whether it was bull riding or serving as chief, George Tall Chief lived his nearly century-long life to the fullest.

"It almost sounds like it (George Tall Chief's life) is created because it is so diverse and it is so broad and successful," Tim Tall Chief said.