



1934 — *Vada* — 2025

Vada Francis Sutton

June 23, 1934 — February 28, 2025

Temple

Vada Francis Sutton, a dedicated public servant, a beloved sister and aunt, and a cherished member of the Bell County community, passed away peacefully on February 28, 2025, at the age of 90. Born on June 23, 1934 in Cedar Knob, Texas to Nallie and Cora Mae Sutton, she lived a life marked by unwavering commitment and deep connection to those around her.

For an extraordinary 52 years Vada served the residents of Bell County in many different positions of county government. She started her career in the Bell County District Attorney's office, she was a court reporter, the administrative assistant to many County Judges until being elected by a record setting 98% of the vote to the office of Bell County Clerk. Generations of Bell County residents knew her as the constant reliable presence, source of knowledge, and beacon of helpfulness. She had a way of making you feel that you had her undivided attention to help with your problems no matter who you were. She was honest, fair, and just and believed the law was the same for everyone.

Vada was a graduate of Salado High School and an alumna of Mary Hardin-Baylor College. While attending Salado High School she was a member of the state winning basketball team. Outside of her office, Vada had many accomplishments. She helped found the Bell County Historical Society where she served many years on the board of directors. She was a 50+ year member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. She served on local state and national committees for both organizations. She served on the Bell County Bail Bond Board. She was a lifelong Democrat and the last elected Democrat official in Bell County. When interviewed and asked when she was going to switch parties like all the other Bell County officials, she replied when hell freezes over. Vada was a lifelong member of the Belton Church of Christ. Her accomplishments are too many to list. She will be sorely missed by her family and friends.

She is survived by her sister, Zelda Sutton Allen, and her niece and constant companion, Amanda Allen, both from Belton, Texas; two nephews, Beauford Lackey Jr., and Lee Lackey Sr., both from Pendleton, Texas; many great nieces and nephews; great great nieces and nephews; and many, many friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Nallie and Cora Mae Sutton of Belton, Texas, and sister, Edna Arlee Sutton Lackey of Pendleton, Texas.

Vada was truly one of kind and cannot be replaced. Like the bumper sticker said, “I don’t know ask Vada.”

Visitation will be Friday, March 14, 2025, from 6 to 8 pm at Harper-Talasek Funeral Home in Belton, Texas. Funeral services will be held Saturday, March 15, 2025, at 10 am at Belton Church of Christ, followed by graveside services at the Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Nolanville, Texas.

by frantic calls from neighbors, police and their security company.

The news was shocking — their home was on fire from what turned out to be a gas explosion.

“Our phones were on do not disturb,” Benavidez said. “We missed most of the notifications. I had to call the (Belton) Fire Department back and the chief told us the whole house was engulfed in flames.”

Benavidez and her husband, Matt, left their two children, ages 7 and 3, with extended



Courtesy

The back of the Benavidez family home is seen after a fire Friday in Belton. Benavidez had just repainted the house her favorite color: green.

family members and rushed out of Austin for the hour-long drive to their home.

“We left the kids because we didn’t know the extent or what we would see coming up to the

house,” Virginia said. “It could have been just a pile of ash by the time we got there.”

The reality was almost as shocking as their imagination of what happened.

happened at 3:22 a.m. in the back part of the house. She described the force of the gas explosion as shattering windows and causing flames to erupt inside the house.

Benavidez, who owns Z&H Old Fashion Candy in downtown Belton, said she was unaware of any gas leaks and started the weekend Friday in a typical family frenzy on the way to visit friends and relatives.

Please see FIRE, 3A

nounced a pause in military aid to Ukraine that is critical to fighting Russia’s invasion.

But later during his nightly address, Zelenskyy indicated that Ukraine didn’t receive direct notification from the U.S. that aid had been cut, and was seeking confirmation.

“I have instructed Ukraine’s Minister of Defense, the heads of our intelligence agencies, and our diplomats to contact their counterparts

Ukraine is ready to sign a lucrative deal on rare-earth minerals and security with Washington. Trump was weighing whether to agree to the signing Tuesday, when he was scheduled to address a joint session of Congress, after Zelenskyy’s sign of contrition, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter who was not authorized to speak publicly about it.

Please see ZELENSKYY, 3A

CENTRAL TEXAS

Longtime Bell County employee Vada Sutton dies at age 90

BY ELLIOT HEMSTREET
TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

BELTON — Vada Sutton, one of the longest-serving employees for Bell County government, died Friday at age 90.

Sutton’s niece Amanda Allen told the Telegram on Tuesday that both of them were almost inseparable throughout her life.

“It’s really hard to (talk about this) because I was with her for almost every single day of my life,” Allen said. “I have so many good memories of her. I remember we had

matching mopeds when ... we went to the (Belton Fourth of July) parade ... for many years with me, her and my mom.”

In addition to her niece, Sutton is survived by her sister, Velva Allen.

Sutton, who was born June 23, 1934, on a ranch in Salado, is best known for being a Bell County employee for 52 years starting as a secretary for the district attorney’s office before retiring as the county clerk in 2005.

Sutton crossed paths with many people throughout her life including current and for-

mer county officials.

Former county commissioner John Fisher recalled a conversation he and Sutton had outside the Bell County Courthouse before her retirement.

“I told (her), ‘Vada, you’re growing long at the tooth. I sure would hope that you share with somebody your institutional knowledge of the county ... (that’s) trapped in your brain. If you leave without sharing that knowledge, our county will be in a huge worry,’” Fisher said. “She just laughed and took it as a compliment.”

Current County Clerk Shelly Coston and Sutton were coworkers for eight years before Sutton’s retirement.

“I worked for the county attorney’s office, which was in the building right next door to where her office was so I was in and out of there a lot,” Coston said. “She was a pillar of this community. She knew everything about everything and one of the smartest people that you could ever meet especially when it came to Bell County.”

County Judge David Blackburn recalled how he first met her.

“I was still working in Killeen ... for the city attorney and I needed some county records,” Blackburn said. “When I came over to research some records and look through them, she was the one who helped me with that and that was my introduction to Vada.”

At a retirement ceremony for Sutton in 2005, former District Judge Jim Clawson said, “Whatever is good in Bell County, we owe it to Vada. I hope she’ll finally write a book and tell the whole story.”

Sutton was one of the first members of the Bell Coun-

ty Historical Commission and played a key role in the county now having more than 200 historical markers. She worked in helping obtain the Carnegie Building for the Bell County Museum.

A visitation will be held 6-8 p.m. March 14 at the Harper-Talasek Funeral Home, 503 N. Main St. in Belton.

Services will be at 10 a.m. March 15 at Belton Church of Christ, 3003 N. Main St., and burial will be in Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Nolanville. Staff writer Jerry Prickett contributed to this article.

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TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE

“If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”

— John 14:14



MARKET REPORT

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Dow Jones Industrials

-670.25

42,520.99

Nasdaq composite

-65.03

18,285.16

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EDITORIAL

TEMPLE DAILY TELEGRAM

Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are the opinions of the writers.

Tonight I learned a legend in Bell County has passed away.

Vada Sutton, age 90, devoted 52 years of her life, beginning employment at the young age of 18. What a life of service.

I'm not exactly sure when my husband John met Vada, but I remember well when I met her shortly after John was elected county judge in 1979. He was lucky to inherit her as his administrative assistant. As soon as I met her, I knew John was in good hands. Vada was a seasoned veteran of all things Bell County,

Oh how she loved this county, so they already shared this commonality. Frankly, if John was here today, he would say Vada did much of the running of the county.

She took both of us under her wing as she led us into the swing of the then entrenched Democratic Party. Oh, what an abundance of knowledge she held in that brilliant mind.

Vada knew how to get things done and done well. She knew the right people, the law, and where all the bodies were buried and she had a wicked sense of humor with all the history, which John absolutely loved.

And she loved him, loved his sense of humor and like herself, knew he loved this county. They worked hand in hand, added Gloria Ramos into the trifecta and things were accomplished in this county like never before. About John's third term that Vada decided that she wanted to step up and run for Bell County Clerk, an even more perfect position for her. Bell County was blessed to have here. We were for sure.

Becky Ann Garth
Temple

EDITORIAL

TEMPLE DAILY TELEGRAM

Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are the opinions of the writers.

I was out of the country when I was saddened to learn of the passing of my friend and Bell County colleague, retired County Clerk Vada Sutton. Vada and I served together from 1999 to her retirement in 2005.

Though I was the first Republican to serve as Bell County judge (1999-2018) and she was a staunch Democrat, politics was never an issue. Vada was fun to work with and always supportive in doing what was best for Bell County.

For 52 years she was involved in every aspect of county government, from elections to records management to historical preservation to name a few. Vada dedicated her life as a public servant to the citizens of Bell County and set the standard on what public service meant. Vada was a legend not only in Bell County but throughout Texas.

With her service, her guidance, and her wisdom, she was an inspiration to us all. A great lady, a great public servant, she will be greatly missed.

Jon Burrows
Temple