



## Dr. Thurman Elder

October 28, 1940 - January 3, 2024

Ira Thurman Elder, 83, passed away on January 3, 2024, in Artesia, NM, surrounded by the love and prayers of his family and friends. A Celebration of Life service will be held at The First United Methodist Church in Portales, NM, at 2:00 p.m. on May 25th, 2024, with Ronnie Williams of Harvest Fellowship Artesia officiating.

On October 28, 1940, Ira Thurman Elder was born to Ira Rickman (Buck) and Eppie Mae (Jones) Elder in Hamlin, TX. From an early age, he pursued excellence in every endeavor. Following the move to New Mexico, he attended Portales Junior High School, and Portales High School, where he was a football quarterback, played basketball, and ran track. Before graduating in 1959, he exemplified the concept of a true student athlete as a member of the honor society, as a delegate to Boys State, and as senior class president.

Thurman began college as an engineering student at New Mexico State University. After three semesters, he transferred to Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) where he then majored in mathematics and physics. Upon completion of his Bachelor of Science degree in 1964, he continued his studies while employed at the University as a Teaching Assistant. He was additionally employed at White Sands Missile Range and at the New Mexico Highway Department as a scientific programmer. In 1966, he obtained a

Master of Arts Degree in Mathematics, where he was then promoted to Instructor. From 1967-69, Thurman left ENMU to pursue his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado where he was employed as a Teaching Assistant. Thurman was invited to rejoin the faculty at ENMU in the fall of 1969 as an Assistant Professor in mathematics and computer science. In 1973, he was granted a sabbatical leave to complete his Doctorate program at Texas Tech University where he had been a Teaching Assistant in applied mathematics since 1972. He continued as a Teaching Assistant until 1974 and then as a Research Assistant from 1975-76. He obtained the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Applied Mathematics and Computer Science in 1979, and returned as a Visiting Research Professor for the summer of 1980. He also was retained as a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute for Numerical Transport Theory. Thurman rejoined ENMU as an Associate Professor in 1969, progressed, earned tenure and was promoted to full Professor in Mathematics and Computer Science in 1983. He served the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as Acting Dean in 1985-1986, as Interim Dean beginning in 1997, and as Dean in 1999 where he continued until his retirement in 2006.

Throughout his 37 years of employment at ENMU, Thurman was utilized in various capacities and on integral University committees. He served as the Chairman of the Department of Mathematical Sciences from 1981-1997. Thurman acted as the ENMU Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) from 1991-2004. In this role, he was the liaison between the NCAA, the Lone Star Conference, and the University, assuring the welfare of those student athletes. He found that working with the coaching staff and the student athletes alike to be a very rewarding experience. He concurrently operated as the Chairman of the Athletic Committee during this 13 year period. Once a member of the ENMU Athletics Hall of Honors Nominating and Selection Committee, Thurman was himself inducted as a honoree in 2004. He served on the Faculty Senate, and while Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, he was Chairman of the Renovation Committee overseeing the

remodeling of the CLAS Building. Thurman also chaired the Student Outcomes and Assessment Committee, the ENMU Search Committees for the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Vice President of Student Affairs, Athletic Director, and Head Men's Basketball Coach, and he was a member of the Search Committee for the Head Football Coach. Additionally, he contributed as a member to the Faculty Research Committee, the Who's Who Committee, the Curriculum Committee, the Program Review Committee, and the Computer Committee. Throughout his long career, Thurman was a member of professional organizations among which include the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM), The American Mathematical Society, and The Mathematical Association of America. His works appeared in publications such as the SIAM Journal of Numerical Analysis; Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications; Journal of Applied Mathematics and Computation, Journal of Transport Theory and Statistical Physics; and Zentrablatt Fur Mathematik. Thurman also made several presentations at SIAM National Meetings, The Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and The Numerical Transport Theory.

In Summer 1987, Thurman accepted a position as a Visiting Research Professor with the Office of Scientific Research of the Air Force at the Weapons Laboratory at Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque. Much of his work was classified at the time. One example involved the Particle Beam System Section of the Space Application Branch. Because of his work at Sandia National Laboratory and Los Alamos National Laboratory, and because of his exemplary reputation around the state, Thurman assisted in the placement of many talented students in internships at those facilities. In fact, he was frequently contacted to see if he had students that were tailored for specific jobs. Some internships resulted in employment for those students following graduation. It filled him with pride to know that he had played a small part in preparing them for their lives still to come.

Thurman brought his own sense of excellence to seemingly lesser tasks. He arranged for outside speakers, as well as coordinated Math-Science and Math-Computer Bowls. He wrote, received, and managed grants for various projects. One institutional research grant he received in 1978 was for the development of a software package for the Department of Mathematical Sciences mini-computer.

Thurman was consistently recommended for promotion prior to achieving the prerequisite degree or minimum years of teaching. Furthermore, once those preconditions were met, he progressed quickly amid the reviews and recommendations of superiors, peers, and students..Thurman declined several employment opportunities for advancement both at ENMU and beyond because he was still so passionate about teaching mathematics to the next generation in the classroom. He loved his community, his alma mater, his colleagues, and his students. This appreciation was mutual and often returned. For example, as the Dean of the Liberal Arts and Sciences, he was recognized for his continuing support of the nursing program from 1998-2006 by the ENMU BSN-Completion Program faculty and students.

In 2006, after nearly forty years of active service at ENMU, Thurman finally decided it was time to retire. However, the University was not completely ready to let him go. Upon the actual date of retirement, he was appointed to the position of Director of the Bachelor's of Applied Arts and Sciences degree, a degree in which Thurman was instrumental in its creation and development. In 2007, he was persuaded to assume the duties of Interim Dean of the College of Business until a permanent Dean was found and began in 2008. Neither superiors nor peers can remember when one person was at the helm of two differing college disciplines during one career.

Thurman's formal employment at ENMU may have concluded but his

commitment to the University never wavered. A long-time member of both the Greyhound Bench Club and the ENMU Foundation Boards, he was an ardent campus athletics supporter. He frequented the majority of home games of various sporting events and regularly attended musical and theatrical performances. He enjoyed participating in other activities like those presented by the Spanish and the Multicultural clubs.

Thurman accrued many post-retirement accolades, as well. In 2009, he was honored with Emeritus status by the University. He was granted the ENMU Distinguished Service Award by the Alumni Association in 2011. He was the Athletic Club Member of the year for 2013-2014. Thurman and Alta formed a beneficial team championing a variety of ENMU pursuits. As such, they were honored as the Volunteers of the Year in 2016 by the Foundation Board.

As Thurman approached retirement, it was said that it would seem strange to walk the halls of the College of Liberal Arts without seeing him. In 2017, Thurman had been affiliated with ENMU for 45 years either as a student, as faculty, or as a volunteer. Throughout, he retained his love of mathematics and of his love of teaching it. He preferred to say as much as he could in as few words as possible to keep communication simple because that is the way that mathematics is communicated. He found that teaching mathematics to be rewarding when his students truly understood a concept and could apply it to solve real problems. It came as no surprise to anyone when ENMU recognized Thurman by dedicating the second floor of the Jack Williamson Liberal Arts building after him. The wing is now known as the Dr. Thurman Elder Hall of Mathematical Sciences. It is a fitting tribute to a man who gave the entirety of his professional employment to teaching mathematical principles and the application of them.

Thurman was not only recognized on the ENMU campus but throughout Portales. He was civic-minded, serving on several community boards. He was

a member of the First United Methodist Church of Portales where he served on various committees throughout the years. When asked what gave his life meaning, he stated, "Have respect for yourself and others and to be responsible for all of your actions. Stay busy. And to do something new each day." Retirement afforded him the opportunity to travel, to read, and to engage in his favorite past-time of working in his home and yard.

Thurman is survived by his wife and soulmate Alta Elder, his daughters Carrie Elder of Dallas, TX, Deanna (Jim) Wilson of Mountain Home, ID, Brenda (Paul) Kirkwood of Artesia, NM; and his son Michael (Alisa) Blandford of Tempe, AZ. He was most happy when surrounded by his grandchildren Jesse (Karen) Wilson of Lake Stevens, WA; Chandra (Derek-Lee) Fridley of Boise, ID; Klayton (Kaitlyn) Kirkwood of Marana, AZ; Kayla (Jackson) Bickel of Artesia, NM; and Michaela Blandford of Tempe, AZ. His delight was in his great-grandchildren Dillon, Courtney, and Daniel Wilson of Lake Stevens, WA; Michael Healy of Marana, AZ; and Lexi and Bradley Bickel of Artesia, NM. He is survived by his sister Freda (Carlin) Long of McKinney, TX, sisters-in-law Barbara Elder of Sweetwater, TX, and Linda Elder of Muleshoe, TX: and by many nieces, nephews, and extended family

Thurman was preceded in death by his grandparents George W. and Ida (Baxter) Elder, and Dave and Dorothy (Hughes) Jones; his parents Ira Rickman (Buck) and Eppie Mae (Jones) Elder; Joyce (Mowrer) and Baby Boy Elder; his sister Ruby Gene Elder, and his brothers George (Bessie), Gerald, and James Elder.

All present and past faculty members of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences will be honorary pallbearers.

The family has requested memorials be directed to the Dr. Thurman and Alta Elder Memorial Scholarship in Mathematical Sciences Education, Friends of

Eastern Foundation, Station 8, Portales, NM 88130.

# Tribute Wall

TW

“ I was sorry to read about Dr. Elder's passing in the Green and Silver magazine.

*Dr. Elder was the one who helped me sort out my college plan when I moved to New Mexico. I remember his kindness and patience.*

*Throughout my time in the computer science program, he supported me in and out of the classroom. The life that I enjoy today is in no small part based on the foundation he helped me put in place while I was at ENMU.*

*He made a difference in people's lives and lived an exemplary one himself. I consider it a privilege to have known him.*

*Tyler Whitney, Seattle*

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**Tyler Whitney** - May 17, 2024 at 06:56 PM

KJ

“ It was with sadness that I just learned from the Green and Silver magazine of Thurman Elder's death in January. This brought to mind several memories of my interactions with him during my five years (2000 - 2005) as the Academic VP at Eastern. Above all I remember how he (and Alta) welcomed me and my wife (Keytha) into the Eastern "family." His calm demeanor had much to do with his success as the leader of the diverse collection of departments within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

I remember our numerous trips to the community colleges across the state (from Hobbs to Farmington) to find ways to assist the smooth transfer of students from their two-year degrees to Eastern's baccalaureate programs. He was especially supportive of the creation of a new Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences degree which allowed students who completed a technical associate's degree to transfer all their credit hours toward the BAAS. And I'm pleased to learn, via his obituary, that he extended his retirement date to serve as Director of this new degree.

His serving as interim dean of the Business Administration is remarkable. But it doesn't surprise me--given the close rapport he had with the retiring Dean Gerry Huybregts..

Finally, my wife and I remember fondly the numerous interactions with him and Alta at social events and during half-time at basketball, volleyball, and football games.

K. Paul Jones

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**K Paul Jones** - April 28, 2024 at 07:05 PM

MC

“ *What a great man! When Carrie was in my Math class he was the first parent to sign up and attend Parent/Teacher conferences. Thurman and Alta were members of the Friday Night Supper Club, instituted by then Mayor Don & Gertrude Davis, of which Alva and I both belonged to. They were a hoot and both brought much to the table! You and Alva are shaking hands and waiting patiently for Alta and me. Rest assured, we'll be there as soon as we tie up a few loose ends!*

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**Mary Helen Carter** - January 26, 2024 at 09:14 PM

AD

*Alta, I know the path you have been down, and you have my sincerest sympathy. I have thought about you often  
Alta D.*

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**Alta dalley** - January 29, 2024 at 02:49 PM