HEROES:
NOT JUST FOR COMIC BOOKS

Meet Oscar Schuchart, a rancher, engineer and true unsung hero for the city of San Antonio.

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As a young boy growing up in San Antonio, Oscar Wurdbach Schuchart was the son of a rancher, and he naturally assumed that his future lay in ranching. As he is a humble man of modest upbringing, if you were to meet him, you would assume nothing less. However, you'd be surprised to know that he played a significant role in the development of some of San Antonio’s most recognizable landmarks, which makes him one of our community’s unsung heroes.

Schuchart’s family originated in the Rio Medina area and had ranching interests there. As a child, he attended school in San Antonio, but spent his summers at the family ranch. A 1939 graduate of Thomas Jefferson High School, Schuchart was unsure of his plans after graduation until a close family friend took him to visit the campus of Texas A&M University. After his visit, Schuchart was hooked and knew his future lay in the million fields of College Station.

In 1942, as the United States ramped up its engagement in WWII following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Schuchart was drafted into the military and served in the U.S. Cavalry. His various stints during the war included attending Officer Candidate School in Fort Riley, Kan., where he was commissioned a second lieutenant, and Yale University, where he attended Aircraft Engineering School. During his service, which lasted from 1942 until 1945, Schuchart helped train more than 100 men as flight engineers for B-29 bombers. According to Schuchart, his class at A&M (1943) called themselves “the class that won the war” as most were called in a mass induction to serve.

Prior to leaving for military service, Schuchart married his longtime sweetheart, Evelyn Marie, to whom he was married for 63 years. A son, Gary, was born in 1946 and a daughter, Luanne, in 1949.

After the war, Schuchart returned to Texas A&M and graduated in 1947 with a degree in mechanical engineering.

After graduation, he worked as a consulting engineer for a few years, until his father passed away and left him 1,150 acres of ranchland in CLE, Texas, just north of Rio Medina. He tried ranching for a year, but found it very difficult financially due to a tremendous drought.

Schuchart then opened his own engineering office, Oscar W. Schuchart PE, in 1955. He is particularly proud of attaining the certification of professional engineer (PE), which he worked hard to obtain. Schuchart owned his office for 44 years and worked on some of San Antonio’s most recognizable landmarks, including the Hilton Palacio Del Rio Hotel. He was responsible for the mechanical and electrical engineering of that project.

The hotel was a massive undertaking, designed and built simultaneously for the World’s Exposition held in San Antonio. better known as HemisFair 68, and was completed in an unprecedented 202 days.

Even more unique was the hotel’s modular construction, where all 496 rooms were put in place by crane over a span of 46 days, which made for a true challenge with the engineering.

Other projects Schuchart was responsible for include many renovations for the landmark Nix Hospital, several schools for the Harlandale School District and approximately 30 Mormon churches in Texas.

One project he is particularly proud of is the work he did engineering the water system in Stone Oak. He designed an intricate pumping system with 48" water mains that would transport water from a well near Highway 281 and Bitters Road to the area that would eventually be developed as Stone Oak.

A proud resident of Independence Hill Retirement Resort Community at Stone Oak, Schuchart is able to see the results of his work on a daily basis. “I’m now living at Independence Hill and enjoying the fruits of my labors,” Schuchart says. “The camaraderie and friendly people and staff make my life a true joy.”

Schuchart is quick to point out that while engineering was his primary work, ranching was always a close second that took up much time. He and his family spent most weekends at their ranch, which at one point numbered over 3,300 acres. An avid hunter, Schuchart loved to hunt both deer and dove. After he and Evelyn purchased a motor home to travel the United States, he would later take up the hobby of lapidary work, where he collected, cut and polished stones and rocks from all over the country.

A member of the San Antonio A&M Club since 1947, Schuchart is also an inductee in the Department of Engineering’s Academy of Distinguished Graduates, and an emeritus member of the department’s Industry Council.

In fact, thanks to Schuchart’s generosity, as Schuchart reminisces about his life’s work, he does so with a sense of pride and humility. Not one to take credit for himself, it’s easy to see that he is an unsung hero, and someone who has dedicated his life to helping others.

“Architects and developers tend to get a lot of the recognition for a project, but engineers often go without the recognition they deserve,” Schuchart says. “Engineers do everything in a building that keeps you comfortable and alive such as plumb- ing, AC, lighting and fire protection systems. I have always been proud of my profession and of our daily contributions.”

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