

## **Don't forget the name Angus Wynne Jr.**

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Just about everybody knows that modern-day Arlington began with the decision of General Motors to open an assembly plant here in the early 1950s. We might still be a small town were it not for what happened in the few years that followed the opening of the automobile plant

Wanting to capitalize on GM's decision, then-Mayor Tom Vandergriff went prospecting for a real estate developer to consider Arlington as a town where major projects could succeed. Never one for thinking small, Tom made his way to New York and introduced himself to the Rockefellers. They had done pretty well in Manhattan and seemed to meet all the qualifications the young mayor was looking for.

One thing led to another, and the Rockefeller people ultimately referred Tom to an associate of theirs in Dallas, Angus Wynne Jr. The mayor showed Wynne the 2,500-acre Waggoner Ranch near the new GM plant. It was prime property in a terrific location, and it was for sale.

Those meetings and discussions set into motion much of what Arlington is best known for today. Consider, for a moment, our town without the Great Southwest Industrial District, **Six Flags Over Texas**, Hurricane Harbor, major-league baseball and just about everything else along the Texas 360 corridor. Hard to imagine? Well, that is what Arlington would have been had Wynne not had a vision of what could be accomplished with that 2,500 acres of ranch land.

Luther Clark, who is now 83, was Wynne's project manager who built Six Flags. Clark remembers discussing the purchase of the Waggoner Ranch with Wynne in 1956.

Arlington was still a small town of less than 25,000 people.

Business and political leaders in Fort Worth and Dallas were not speaking to one another; feuding characterized the relationship. It seemed to Wynne that a successful real estate project located virtually halfway between the two urban centers would require the cooperation of investors in both cities.

According to Clark, Wynne believed the emergence of television would bring the cities together. He figured that people throughout North Texas would see themselves as one community because they were in the same TV market.

Looking back, it is hard to know if Wynne's prediction about the power of television was what led to regional cooperation. But he thought it would, and that was good enough for him to launch his project. He bought the ranch.

Wynne's plan was to develop an industrial park that would attract corporate America,

first to North Texas and then to Arlington, right in the center of things. His youngest son, David Wynne, still talks of the times his dad brought him, as a small boy, to "a big open field, out in the country," and described his plans for major development. Part of that open field is today occupied by The Ballpark in Arlington.

Angus Wynne created the Great Southwest Corp. and constructed the first buildings in the ambitious development, hoping to attract some tenants. The venture required tons of capital and an income stream to support the investment. Like most real estate projects, it was slow going in the beginning. The challenge he faced was to figure out how to produce enough cash flow to sustain the fledgling project.

Walt Disney provided just the answer Wynne was looking for.

Disneyland, a whole new concept in family entertainment, was a success. Would something like that work in Arlington? It was worth a try.

Wynne borrowed \$3.6 million and built the theme park. When it opened in 1961, he planned to operate it for a few years, use the money from ticket sales to support the industrial park development, and then reclaim the amusement park ground for more warehouses and offices after Six Flags had run its course.

It all succeeded beyond everybody's expectations. Wynne kept buying more land to meet the demands of industrial park users, **Six Flags Over Texas** became a huge success in its own right, and Vandergriff started looking for a major-league baseball team.

Wynne also built the Great Southwest Railroad, Six Flags Inn, Great Southwest Golf Course, Neiman Marcus' Greenhouse and much more.

Arlington's and Grand Prairie's commercial tax base expanded rapidly and produced property tax revenues that increased the quality of life for the residents of both towns, which grew to proportions sufficient to link the old feuding cities to the east and west.

So when you hear and read that Vandergriff thinks Texas 360 ought to be named the Angus Wynne Jr. Expressway, you know why. As much as anyone, Wynne shaped the face of this part of North Texas.

Sadly, his dramatic success in Arlington was derailed in 1970 by the infamous bankruptcy of Penn Central Railroad, which by then had gained control of Great Southwest Corp. Wynne died in 1979.

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