

BETTY SANFORD CRAWFORD SHE WAS QUITE A LADY

Her passion for the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic came naturally. Born into the family that created the game, the Classic was an important part of her life from the beginning.

BY TORI COUCH



CRAWFORD FAMILY ARCHIVE

As Life Directors of the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, Betty and John made a formidable team when it came to the traditions and business activities of the Classic.

Elizabeth “Betty” Sanford Crawford loved college football. The University of Texas (UT) graduate always made time for the fall sport, especially when it involved the Longhorns. Crawford, her husband John Crawford, and their three daughters spent fall weekends watching football and attended multiple Red River Rivalry games between Texas and Oklahoma at Dallas’ Fair Park in Cotton Bowl Stadium. “We just love it,” Kristin Andreasen, the middle daughter, said. “Our family wouldn’t know what to do without football.” That same sentiment applies to the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic.

No matter which teams participated, Crawford ensured the family attended and eventually supported the game in various roles.

Promoting the game became a priority for Crawford at an early age. Her father, J. Curtis Sanford, founded the Cotton Bowl Classic in 1937 hoping it would become a major part of the college football landscape.

Sanford passed that dream on to his daughter. She embraced the legacy and succeeded her mother, Betty Sanford, as the “First Lady of the Cotton Bowl Classic”. Crawford attended every board meeting, luncheon and event associated with the game.

No one matched her passion. “She could take that story and just work it all the way through to where it is today,” John said. “She was a great spokesperson. She knew all the history, and not many people, if any, knew all the history.”

This year, the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the 86th Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic will kick off without its best and most vocal advocate in attendance. Crawford passed away in July after a battle with ALS.

Crawford loved everything about the Classic, but she also spent 45 years building a successful commercial real estate career in Dallas and serving the community in other ways.

She founded the Profitmaker Investment Club, was president of Marianne Scruggs Garden Club, and held various positions in the Junior League of Dallas, Crystal Charity Ball, Dallas Women’s Club and the Dallas Arboretum.

“She was elegance personified,” Courtney Slater, her oldest daughter, said. “She was a lady of grace and elegance that is not much duplicated these days. She had a calm, warm peace about her that made everybody feel at ease.”

No matter how many organizations Crawford joined, though, the Cotton Bowl Classic held a special place in her heart.

When John married Betty 42 years ago, he knew the commitment included many hours working with the Classic. He started on the public relations committee, then took on an officer position and later served as the bowl’s chairman.

“The Cotton Bowl to Betty, we found out a long time ago, was more than just a game,” John said. “We did everything possible to continue to promote that.”

Keeping the game, and everything associated with it, a family affair was an easy task.



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“The Cotton Bowl stirs up the energy in our home at least as much as Christmas,” Elizabeth Bentrup, the youngest daughter, said. “It’s just kind of a spirit and enthusiasm in December that the whole family kind of feels and rallies around.”

Slater was the first female driver in the Cotton Bowl Classic’s hospitality program during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Andreasen followed suit and later worked in the ticket office. Slater also served on the first Cotton Bowl Classic Council comprised of young professionals in North Texas and then on the Board of Directors for three terms.

Bentrup started driving for the hospitality program in 2000 and now coordinates it. She oversees 65 college students who drive the participating teams’ staff and families around Dallas, Arlington and the surrounding area during bowl week.

Need a ride to the mall or a private lunch?

Bentrup’s team has that covered.

The tradition will continue with the grandkids too. Andreasen’s oldest son is entering year four as a driver and his brother will join this year along with Slater’s daughters. Even Bentrup’s son, who is not yet eligible for the hospitality program, will volunteer at the game.

There’s no doubt Betty would love seeing everyone so involved.

“That was very important to her,” Andreasen said. “It warms my heart it will continue on through generation to generation in our family.”

Crawford’s determination and commitment has helped Sanford’s vision come alive. The Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic is now a respected New Year’s Six Bowl and this year is a College Football Playoff Semifinal matchup.

The game moved from Fair Park to AT&T Stadium before the 2010 season. While leaving behind a place with an extensive history was difficult, Slater said, the choice made sense given the money and prestige associated with the top college bowl games.

The move paid off.

“It’s a common thread of making sure that we do everything possible to continue moving the ball down the field and keeping the Cotton Bowl Classic football game at the top of the heap, which it is,” John said.

In 2014, the Cotton Bowl Athletic Association also established a foundation benefitting education-based organizations in North Texas.

To honor Crawford’s enduring, positive impact on the Cotton Bowl Classic, the foundation’s board donated \$50,000 to UT Southwestern’s ALS research program in her name last summer.

“Betty was such a special person. She always had a smile on her face, was so endearing to so many of us and truly epitomized grace,” Rick Baker, President/Chief Executive Officer, Cotton Bowl Athletic Association, said. “The legacy of

Betty and her impact will live on in our minds and in our hearts.”

Crawford’s legacy reaches far beyond a football game, especially around the holidays.

Every Thanksgiving for more than two decades, the five Crawfords participated in the Dallas Turkey Trot, Andreasen said. The family eventually established their own Turkey Trot as husbands and grandchildren joined the fun. Betty, of course, spurred that new tradition and created t-shirts documenting every run.

Soon after each Turkey Trot, the family shifts its focus to the game Crawford promoted with immense pride.

“They [the Cotton Bowl Classic staff] do everything with class, and everything the right way to the best of their abilities,” Bentrup said. “They had no greater fan than Betty Crawford.”



BRAD BRADLEY/CBA

The Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic was truly a family affair for the Sanfords and Crawfords. Betty always looked forward to the events surrounding the game so she could spend time with John, her mother Betty Sanford (second from left), and Rick Baker (second from right), the CBA’s President/Chief Executive Officer.

