

Texas LONE STAR

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**Portrait of
Commitment**

**Junction ISD Trustee
Overcomes Tragic Accident To Serve
Community, School District, and Family**



Features

'What Is,' not 'What If'

From waking up in a hospital bed following a devastating hunting accident to successfully running for the Junction ISD Board, Derrick Ard has pushed himself to continually serve his community, his school district, and his family. Read his amazing story.6

A Strong Foundation

Publicly funded pre-K programs can greatly improve our education system; by giving children a high-quality education early on, we can improve their chances for success in elementary and secondary school. Take a look at some eye-opening facts and figures about the difference early education makes.9

The Results Are In

Ninety-three percent of *Texas Lone Star* readers who responded to this year's readership poll rated the magazine as either "very good" or "good" as a source of education information. See what other interesting opinions and thought-provoking comments you provided in this year's survey.12



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TASB On Line

Each month in this space we update you on the latest information on www.tasb.org and the Association's related sites. Visit our sites periodically to see new content and features.

Recently, we've been exploring new ways to share information using video and audio on www.tasb.org. A video invitation to the NSBA Southern Region Conference, which the Association is hosting this year, shares good reasons to attend: http://lts.tasb.org/events/southern_region/video.aspx. If you missed the March Capitol Conference and Legislative Reception, you can hear what the speakers had to say: <http://gr.tasb.org/events/audio.aspx>. In the coming months, we'll be exploring other ways to deliver meaningful content using multimedia.

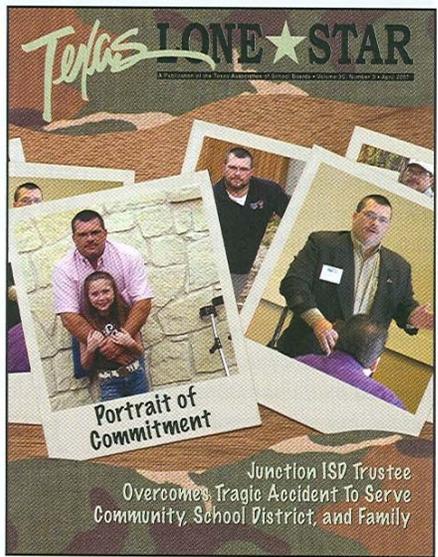
For more information about www.tasb.org and our related sites, contact Josh Sklar at 512-467-0222 or 800-580-8272 toll-free, or send e-mail to josh.sklar@tasb.org. ★

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ABOUT THE COVER

The photos only begin to show the depth of courage and commitment held by Junction ISD Trustee Derrick Ard, who recovered from a terrible hunting accident to become a model of service and selflessness.



'What Is,' not 'What If'

**Trustee Overcomes
Tragic Accident
to Serve Junction
Community**

by April Dykman

Derrick Ard awoke in his hospital bed. As his eyes adjusted to the light, he saw a horse standing in front of him.

"I thought I had been taken to a veterinary clinic," he said. "The image was so real. It really scared me, and only when someone entered the room and distracted me did the image fade and I came back into reality. It was time for another morphine shot."

Ard was suffering through frightening hallucinations brought on by painkillers, prescribed to ease the pain of several operations, including three amputation surgeries. "I spent three weeks in ICU experiencing these hallucinations. Each day, my room seemed to look different to the point that I thought they had moved me every night. My wife assured me they had not," he said.

A Blur of Doctors and Nurses

Ard developed a love of hunting during his years living in Tyler County, starting at age 13 when he received his first gun. It was the same 12-gauge shotgun he was hunting with March 28, 1997, that fired an unexpected blast, hitting him in the thigh and severing his femoral artery. "It's strange how I never felt the impact, but when I saw my own blood pouring from my body as if someone had turned on a faucet, I began to feel faint and dizzy," said Ard. He believed the wound would be fatal and soon lost consciousness.

When he came to, he considered that he would probably die alone in the middle of nowhere. But as he thought about his wife, Regina, and daughter, Samantha, he resolved to get up and try to find help. He managed to reach a highway, which he estimated was 100 yards away, and flag down a passing car.

"When the couple approached me and started rendering first aid, I felt relieved that at least I would not die alone. I asked them to tell my family that I loved them and would miss them dearly." As the couple worked to apply pressure to the massive wound, he could feel his blood pressure dropping.

The ambulance arrived. Ard was losing so much blood that his arteries had begun to collapse, making it difficult for the medics to get an IV started. A passing motorist stopped at the scene to render aid, and, miraculously, she turned out to

be a registered nurse at a trauma center. She successfully started the IV.

"To this day, I do not know who that RN was," Ard said. "I know she is out there somewhere, and she will never be forgotten."

Over an hour after Ard reached the highway, the Life Flight helicopter arrived to take him to the hospital. During the 35-minute flight, Ard quit breathing. The paramedics worked quickly to insert a tube down his throat, temporarily allowing him to breathe. By the time they arrived at the hospital, he had stopped breathing again. A blur of doctors and nurses surrounded him as they went to work.

"All I knew is that my adrenaline had finally worn off, and I was in a great deal of pain. The only thing I wanted was for them to hurry up and take me to surgery because I knew they would put me to sleep and I wouldn't feel anything," said Ard.

His last memory before surgery was being wheeled into the elevator on the way to the operating room. Later he learned that he bled to death on the operating table and had to be resuscitated twice. His leg was seriously wounded, and to further complicate matters, pellets from the shotgun blast traveled into his abdomen. A kidney was spared by mere millimeters. Ard's condition was so critical that the surgeons could only try to stop the bleeding and monitor him in ICU.

'I Can Still Fish'

Doctors told his wife that he probably would not make it through the night.

"Everyone was so sure that I would not survive that my father-in-law actually started digging my grave. I was to be buried in a private cemetery," said Ard.

When Ard survived the first night, doctors advised his wife that he was unlikely to survive the next night. For the

next 72 hours, doctors continued to predict that he would not survive.

"On the third night, I surprised them all. I lived," Ard said.

He awoke to hear the doctors discussing the amputation of his right leg. Initial shock was soon replaced by thankfulness to be alive. "To me, losing my leg was a fair price to pay to survive. I knew that I would be able to be with my wife and daughter, and that was all that mattered."

Ard underwent three surgeries to amputate his leg and exploratory surgery on his abdomen, requiring weeks on morphine. "You can't distinguish between what is real and what is not," he said. "I remember seeing an airplane crash right next to the hospital, [but] there were no windows in my ICU room. Or the time someone was taking a shower upstairs and the shower drain was dumping the water onto my bed. That was a miserable six hours."

Eventually he was stable enough to be moved into a private room. When his youngest sister came to visit, she walked into the room crying. He had tubes down his throat and couldn't speak, so he wrote on a piece of paper, "Don't cry, little sister, I can still fish." He keeps that note with him today.



Ard was determined to recover and get his life back, so much so that doctors released him one month earlier than they had originally expected. For two long months, he had dreamed of the moment he would get to go home.

"Everything looked and felt different. At least my dog still recognized me," Ard said.

The first thing he wanted to do was to plan a fishing trip to his father-in-law's pond. "It was easy to get to and easy to fish from a wheelchair," he said. "We caught a lot of fish that day, and after that I knew that everything would be OK and that life would go on."

Always Doing More

Life did go on. Ard graduated with honors in December 2000 with an associate's degree in PC maintenance and networking, twice making the national dean's list. He received the President's Award for Student of the Year in 2000-01, was the first student from San Angelo's Howard College to be nominated for the All USA Academic Team, and was the first to be named to the All State Academic Team in 2001.

"I think my parents are still in shock," he said. "They could not make me study

in high school, and I was thrilled with a C-minus (then)."

Ard, now 38, works for Texas Tech University in the PC network support department and is IT manager for the Hill Country campuses. He has also become an active member of his Junction community, joining the local chapter of the Rotary Club in 2001.

Bob Hickerson, Ard's boss at Texas Tech and fellow Rotarian, said, "He is the most upbeat member we have, and he always sees the potential rather than the problems. He is a constant reminder that we can always do more to support the club and our service projects."

In 2002, Ard helped establish the Kimble Hospital Foundation, which raises funds for the local hospital. "I was recently elected to serve as the foundation's president. We are in the process of reorganizing." A proposed assisted living facility was in the works, but the project hit too many road blocks and had to be shelved. "As the new president, I am tasked with rebuilding the relationship between the foundation board and the hospital board. We are on the road to recovery."

Ard is also a member of the Junction Volunteer Fire Department, becoming

basic certified and a certified SCUBA diver. Cecil Conner, chief of the department, said, "Derrick takes the responsibility of operating the rescue truck on most structure fires or vehicle accidents. He gets scene lighting up and going if it's nighttime. For vehicle accidents, he gets the power unit to the Jaws of Life going."

"He and I both know that he will never be able to grab a large hose line and make an interior attack on a home, but there is a place for everyone on the scene. If I had 20 firefighters fighting for the one nozzle spot and no one to

do the job that he does, we would all be in trouble. He has found his place in our department, and I appreciate his service to his fellow firefighters and his community."

'A Role Model for All'

In 2004, Ard accomplished another goal: that of running a successful campaign for the Junction ISD Board.

"My journey through life has made me value a good education and know how important it is to our children," said Ard, a member of the 2007 Leadership TASB class. "Being on the board allows me to help make decisions that ensure we are doing right by our children."

Running for reelection this spring, Ard considers educating himself to be one of his most important duties as a school board member. "The more knowledge I gain, the better I can handle difficult situations should they arise," he said. "One of my biggest accomplishments was discovering a new style of roofing material for our district, which in turn saved the district over a quarter of a million dollars, possibly more. We are now getting more of our buildings re-roofed for less than it would have cost us to do just one."

It has been 10 years since the accident, but Ard's disability has done anything but limit his potential.

"Could I have been better off if none of it ever happened? Sure I could have, but you are not supposed to think in terms of 'what if.' We need to think of 'what is' and 'what can be.' Over the years, I have done more with my life. I have educated myself and have had the pleasure of meeting many wonderful people who gave me so much. I wanted to become a member of the community and give back."

According to Hickerson, Ard has done just that. "Derrick is an inspiration to everyone he meets. Given his tragic accident, most people would forgive him if he was a little bitter and self-absorbed. In fact, he is exactly the opposite. He gives of himself and his talents freely, and there is no one in Junction who doesn't profit from his presence and his friendship. He is a role model for all, not just those with handicaps."★

April Dykman is a TASB Communications Division consultant. This article is based on interviews with Derrick Ard and on his stories entitled "A Love for Life" and "The Aftershock."

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