
Texas loses an icon: Babe Aycock passes away at 91

by Kelly Harrell

For anyone who knew Babe Aycock, it was only fitting: One of her last requests was to be buried in her Mart EMS uniform, her red paramedic patch on her shoulder. The 91-year-old paramedic came into EMS late in her career, but it defined her life in the last 17 years, and it defined her in death.

Texas EMS lost a colorful and well-known part of its history in November when Babe passed away after an illness. Aycock, a native of Mart, was one of the world's oldest paramedics, if not the oldest. She claimed the distinction of being the oldest active paramedic in Texas.

Edith Babe Aycock — she changed her middle name legally to Babe in the 1980s — was born August 10, 1915, in Mart. She graduated from Mart High School and 4-C College in Waco. From 1956 to 1964, she served as Mart city secretary, and she went on to serve a total of 16 years as the first female mayor of the Central Texas town. In addition to helping create the Mart Community Center, the Mart Senior Center and the local Meals on Wheels program, she was a founder and charter member of Mart EMS. The service began in 1983 when the funeral home quit making EMS runs. As mayor, she led the city



in organizing volunteers and raising money for an ambulance, banking \$60,000 and putting together a crew of 32 volunteers when Mart EMS opened its doors, a remarkable feat in a town with a population of about 2,000. The next year she became certified as an ECA. But Babe wasn't content to sit back. She became an EMT, an EMT-I and then, in 1989, a paramedic. She was 74 years old when she first certified as a paramedic. "I asked her why she was studying to be a paramedic, and she said that she couldn't ask other people to do something she wasn't doing," said Nancy Hartley, Babe's daughter.

She made runs as a volunteer for Mart EMS

until she was well into her 80s. Even a broken back about five years ago couldn't keep her off the truck. When her doctor cautioned against

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Babe Aycock started in 1984 as an ECA and went on to certify as an EMT, an EMT-I and, in 1989, a paramedic. She made runs as a volunteer on the Mart EMS ambulance well into her 80s.

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any lifting, she simply rode out to help the crews. It was only in the last few years that she had to quit making calls. But she held out hope she would return. In the summer of 2005, she recertified as a paramedic.

“She was bound and determined and said she was good for four more years. She said she might recertify again (in 2009),” Hartley said.

That feistiness and independence defined Babe. Mike Foegelle, a former DSHS employee in Temple, tells the story of a visit he made to Babe in Mart another time she was recertifying. Babe, who was not shy with her opinions, told Foegelle that she was having a hard time getting all her continuing education credits. Mike suggested that she get some of her CE hours online. He assumed she didn’t have computer skills and told her to have someone call him so he could give them the info. He recalls that Babe looked straight at him.

“She said, ‘Hell, honey, just send it right to me,’” Foegelle says. “I thought that because she was in her 80s, she wouldn’t know how to use the Internet. I had underestimated her.”

Through the years, she continued her EMS education, becoming an EMS coordinator and completing training in ACLS, BTLS and advanced high-angle rescue. At the 1993 Texas EMS Conference, Babe volunteered to be a patient in a high-angle demonstration on a 16 story hotel.

She also received several

awards in her later years. In the early 1990s, she won a Jefferson Award for Public Service and was invited to the national ceremony in Washington, D.C.. The Jefferson Awards for Public Service is a nationwide program to recognize unsung heroes and celebrate community betterment through volunteerism. In 1994, the Texas Department of Health (now DSHS) inducted her into the EMS Hall of Fame, which honors individuals who have made a significant and dramatic contribution to emergency medical services in Texas during their careers.

Still, Hartley says her mother’s proudest achievement was Mart EMS. At her funeral, medics from the area lined the stairs of the church, and at the cemetery, the medics called her number, 12. She insisted that the funeral be conducted with an open casket – an unusual request – so that people would remember her in uniform. In an interview in 1993, Babe described the time a reporter asked her how she wanted to be remembered.

“As a volunteer paramedic who cared. I will miss a meal, I will miss sleep, I will put off going to the doctor because I want to work my shift. When I leave a place, I want them to say, ‘There goes a 77-year-old paramedic, and she works everyday.’”



GETAC Meeting Dates for 2007

All meetings are in Austin, except where noted. Watch the website for details about location and times. Generally, committees meet the days before the general GETAC meeting. A limited number of hotel rooms are offered at an \$85/night rate.

February 21-23, 2006

Crowne Plaza Hotel
6121 N. I-35 (at U.S. 290)
(512) 323-5466

May 23-25, 2006

Hilton Austin Airport
9515 New Airport Dr.
(512) 358-6767

August 22-24, 2006

Hilton Austin Airport
9515 New Airport Dr.
(512) 358-6767

November 17-19, 2006

(In Houston in conjunction with Texas EMS Conference 2007)