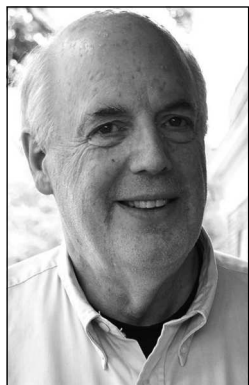


LOCAL

COMMENTARY

A Doctor And A Deputy, Linked On A Roadside Marker



CLIPS TO KEEP
CAMERON JUDD

After my growing family and I moved to Greene County in the fall of 1982, Bob Hurley, Greene County to the core, told me I'd need to hang around at least 30 years before I could consider myself local.

Well, the 30-year mark passed years back and I'm now edging toward the 40-year mark. Maybe even Bob would consider me a local now. I certainly think of Greene County as home.

There's a particular local spot that always sparks memories of my early experiences in this community and people I came to know at that time. That spot is a corner near the John Deere plant where Rick Coyle Boulevard joins Hal Henard Drive (or Hal Henard Road, as I usually hear it called. The road sign calls it "Drive," though, so I'll stick with that for consistency.)

Rick Coyle Boulevard is the small avenue leading off of Hal Henard Drive and into the recently completed Rick Coyle Firing Range.

Whenever I see that road marker with the Henard and Coyle names on it, I'm reminded that I was lucky enough to arrive in Greene County while it was still possible to meet both of those men. They were very different men, pursuing different professions and coming from different generations, but they had something in common: Both were citizens any community would be proud to claim.

Because many people living here now arrived too late to meet this pair, I want to tell a little about them here.

Hal Henard first. Thanks largely to the Greeneville school named after him, almost everybody has at least heard the name of Hal Henard.

He was born in 1908 and died in 1984. By profession he was a physician; in community life he was a deeply involved citizen and leader. The man had class and dignity.

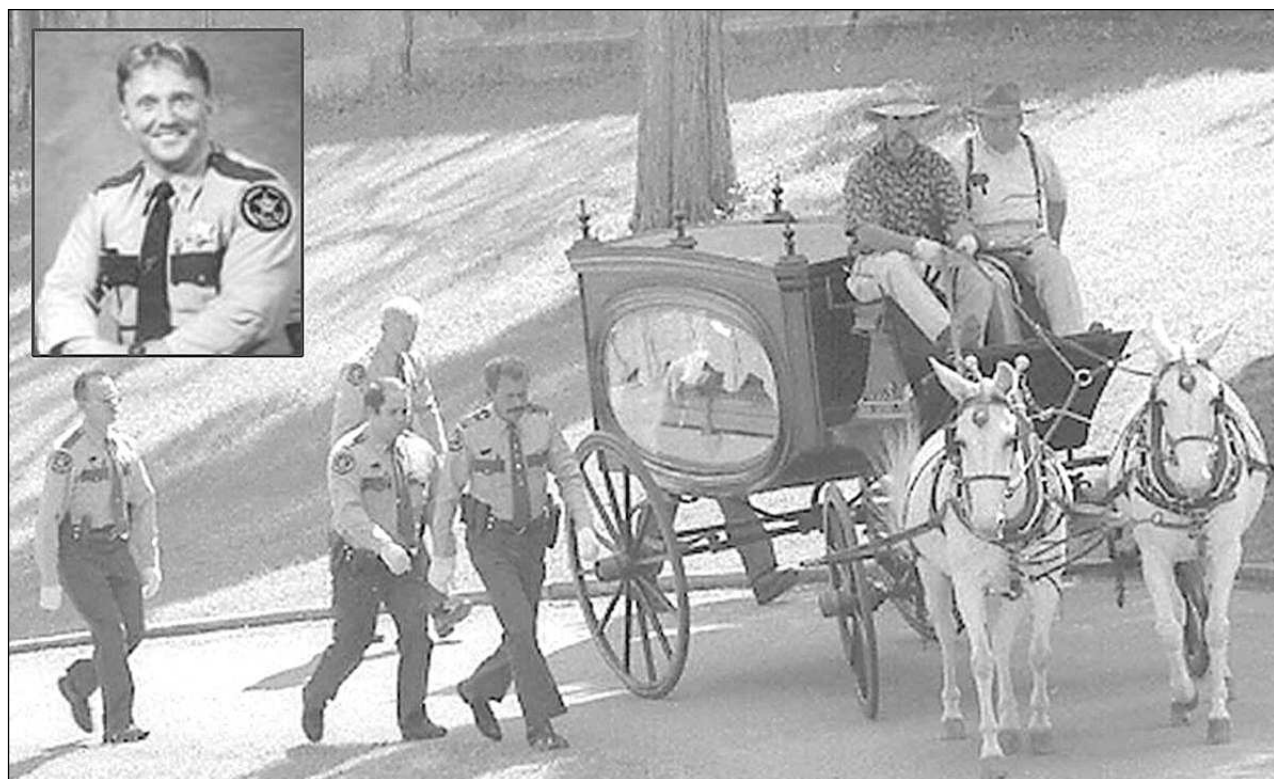
When I first met him, he was part of the Greeneville City Board of Education, as was one of my then-bosses at The Greeneville Sun, Ken Hood Jr., a good friend of Dr. Henard.

Dr. Henard's craggy face could look rather somber if he was listening closely to something, or deep in thought, but when I mentally picture him, I see him as smiling. That's because of the welcoming, open manner he had in dealing with others (even newspaper reporters, who can sometimes be annoying). He was never my personal physician, but it was easy for me to see why his patients loved him.

Dr. Henard was smart, too. As our local boards of education face new challenges in our own era, it would be fascinating if we could know Dr. Henard's take on those matters. That, sadly, is not an available option now.

That was Dr. Henard. But who was Rick Coyle?

Rick was dispatcher for the Greene County Sheriff's Department when I knew him. As with Hal Henard, I met Rick through my newspaper job. He was young, friendly and always seemed glad to help out anyone who called or came by the GCSD, at that time headquartered in the lower level of the Greene County Courthouse.



When slain Greene County deputy Sgt. Rick Coyle (shown in inset photo at the upper left) was laid to rest, his coffin was carried in this horse-drawn hearse while other law enforcement officers walked alongside.



Hal Henard

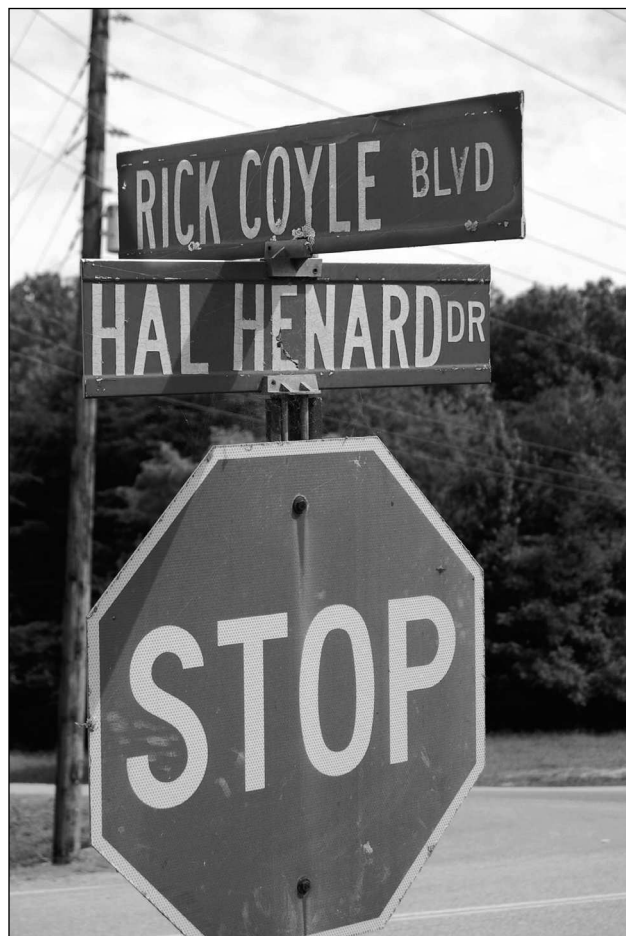
Rick also was funny. He laughed a lot and had the ability to make those around him laugh, too.

I didn't see him all that often, mostly on the occasions I needed to stop by and see the sheriff about something going on in the news. Every time I saw Rick, he gave me a grin and a welcome, and had some funny comment or light-hearted anecdote to share. He was ideally suited to be a connecting point between the public and the GCSD, because his default setting with visitors was positive.

Though Rick Coyle seemed perpetually cheerful to me, others who knew him better say he had his various moods, as we all do. That's just part of being human.

Lori Rader, longtime employee of the GCSD, said this week that one thing Rick consistently did, no matter what his mood, was end his shifts by telling his coworkers to have a good day or good evening, and that he'd see them next time.

Eventually Rick left the relative safety of the dispatcher desk job to go on the road as a working deputy. That change in



SUN PHOTO BY CAMERON JUDD

This road marker links the distinct and remarkable legacies of two local men who devoted themselves to the good of others.

function is what led to the day when Rick's typical "see you next time" pledge could never again be fulfilled.

Sept. 25, 1995. It was a Monday, and Sgt. Rick Coyle was on a call, investigating a hit-and-run incident out in the county. Lori, still working the front desk at the Sheriff's Department, told me this week that she was the one who received that call, and had nearly sent a newer officer to deal with it. But the door had opened and Rick Coyle walked in. He volunteered to be the

responder.

He headed back out, got in his cruiser and left.

No one anticipated the situation would be anything but routine, but sometime later, Rick's strained voice came over the radio, asking for an ambulance. He'd been

shot.

Lori reacted fast and called an off-duty officer who lived not far from the area Rick was, and he readily headed out to find Rick.

Someone else got there first: A man in a nearby barn had heard the sound of gunshots and went to check it out. Rick's physical position revealed he'd been trying to pull himself into his cruiser but had made it only far enough to reach the radio and call for help. The man from the barn got on the radio himself and began frantically calling for help to come fast, saying an officer was down.

At the Sheriff's Department, everyone was feeling frantic themselves as they heard all this, and sick with shock at the unexpected, grim direction a seemingly routine hit-and-run had taken.

Rick had been shot three times. His protective vest had stopped one bullet, but the other two had struck him in unprotected areas and did significant internal damage. The man who had shot him (a fugitive from Alabama, wanted on felony charges) was yards away, dead, at least five bullets in him. He and Rick apparently had exchanged shots from a distance of only a few feet. Those must have been some horrible moments.

Rick was taken to a hospital, but despite best efforts, his wounds proved unsurvivable.

When they laid Ricky to rest, officers and police and other first responders from all over came to salute their fallen peer, as did everyday people from across the county.

Rick Coyle's too-short life was that of a man seemingly hard-wired to serve others. Even before devoting 16 years to the Greene County Sheriff's Department, he'd worked a year with the Northern Illinois University Police. Before that, he'd been in the United States Air Force. So a big part of his life of 41 years had been spent supporting and protecting other people.

The GCSD still remembers and honors Rick Coyle. A picture of him is displayed in the outer area of the main office. Rick, in that small photograph, looks exactly like I remember him, with a big and bright smile.

There are many younger GCSD deputies now who had no chance to meet Rick Coyle, and that is too bad. They'd have liked him. I know I did. Just as I had liked Dr. Henard.

That the names of these two men, Henard and Coyle, are linked forever on that road marker is fitting, as I see it. A doctor and a deputy, each serving his community in a different way... and each doing it well. These men gave it all they had.

Next time I drive out near John Deere, I'm going to let that road marker serve to remind me that we of Greeneville and Greene County were blessed to have had the likes of Hal Henard and Rick Coyle among us. The community that is our home today is more hallowed because they lived.

Cameron Judd is a lifelong Tennessean born and raised in Cookeville, and a Greene County resident since 1982, when he first joined The Greeneville Sun staff. He also is an extensively published author of western and frontier fiction, having worked with several major publishing houses. In 2019 he won a first-place Tennessee Press Association award for his personal column.

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