

Claude Hutcherson

Claude Hutcherson occupies a unique niche in the history of women's basketball. Beginning in 1949, he sponsored Wayland's women's basketball team and used his commercial air service to fly them to road games. Claude and his wife Wilda provided financial support and transportation and opened the doors of their home to all the players. During the next 25-plus years the team, which became known as the Hutcherson Flying Queens, compiled a 712-106 record, a mark which includes a collegiate record of 131 consecutive victories, as well as 10 AAU national championships and 10 second-place finishes. This happy relationship began in 1948, when Claude furnished airplanes for the Queens' trip to Mexico.

Born in 1907 near the small West Texas town of Gail, Texas, Claude Hutcherson graduated from Wayland, which was then a junior college, in 1926. He received his bachelor's degree from Texas Tech in 1928. By the time he married Wilda Hewett in 1942, he was already flying airplanes. They eventually had two children, eight grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.

The couple moved to Plainview, where Hutcherson began selling and servicing airplanes — at first in a partnership, then on his own, founding Hutcherson Air Service in 1948. The firm sold hangared, serviced, and chartered airplanes, sold fuel, and modified spray planes. He also had business interests in farming, ranching, and real estate.

An active community leader, Hutcherson served as chairman of the board of the City National Bank, president of the YMCA, and director of the Chamber of Commerce. In 1956 he was the first recipient of Plainview's Citizen of the Year award, as the honor was then called.

In 1972 the Hutchersons were the principal donors for the new physical education complex at Wayland, which now bears their name. Hutcherson Physical Education Center, known as the "Hutch," is the home of Wayland athletics, seats 3,000, and is one of the premier gymnasiums in the Texas Panhandle.

Hutcherson was inducted into the Helms Foundation Hall of Fame at the AAU National Tournament in Gallup, New Mexico in 1968. He was a member of the inaugural class of the Wayland Baptist University Athletic Hall of Fame in 1992, and in 2003 he was inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame. He died in 1977.

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