

# Remembering Ted

## The Justice Coalition – how it started

By Joan Taylor

On December 17, 2008, a unique era in the history of Jacksonville came to an end when Ted Hires died – an era that won't be forgotten by many, especially the innocent victims of violence. Following is a summary of those years that thrust Ted into the hearts and minds of many citizens in Jacksonville. It began in the last decade.

The early 90s were years of turmoil, violence and injustice for many residents in our city. While politicians were citing statistical data (indicating that murder rates were down), family members of innocent victims were declaring, "Not in my home; it is up 100%!"

While political leaders were citing conviction rates, victim families were declaring, "Four years for deliberately taking the life of a human being is not justice." Still another interest group was declaring, "Give us money for prevention—that is the answer." Yet, families of victims were asking, "Who is going to help us get our lives back? The system has failed us."



In the midst of all those voices arose a small group of praying families outraged by

the lack of justice for murder victims in the criminal justice system. The group called itself

Life Is Valuable (LIV) and set a goal to see legislative changes in the state sentencing guidelines for second-degree murder. To get its message out, LIV lobbied state representatives and held marches and political forums.

Ted Hires attended one such forum at the Florida Times Union building on March 2, 1995, just a week after he and his staff had been robbed and terrorized in his corporate office. At that point Ted's businesses had been robbed a total of six times; however, when he heard the stories of the families of innocent murder victims, he was humbled.

"I thought I had problems until I heard what I heard tonight." With those words, a special relationship and advocacy began between LIV and Ted Hires. He went on to say, "Here's my card. If there is anything that I can do for your group, please let me know. If you need a place to meet, I have a place where you can meet."

Soon, LIV began holding open meetings at Sonny's corporate office on Lane Avenue. Ted and his wife,

Wanda, supported the meetings and special events, bringing guests with them. But then one of his restaurants was robbed again, his son, Ted, Jr., held at gunpoint for the second time. Ted's own experience when he was robbed, and heightened concern for his son's safety, caused him to make a commitment to get more involved in working for change on behalf of victims.

He believed that groups seeking positive changes could accomplish more if they worked together, so in 1995 a small group of community leaders and victim groups met to form the Justice Coalition, and Ted was elected president. Their first major project was to distribute, and subsequently deliver, 10,000 petitions to the Jacksonville City Council, urging its members to make reduction of crime a priority in the city.

Ted solicited the help of Paul McCormick's public relations firm and began his work on behalf of innocent victims of crime. He was convinced that if the public

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