



# Donor Spotlight:

## *Ben F. Vaughan, III*

**B**en F. Vaughan, III may be described as a devoted husband, father and grandfather. He may also be described as a hunter, conservationist and lover of the land, but all that aside Vaughan is a man of integrity. By trade, Vaughan is a third generation attorney though by his count there are some five generations of attorneys on both sides of his family.

Since 1968, he has been at the Austin firm of Graves Dougherty Hearon and Moody after clerking a year at the Texas Supreme Court. His practice early on focused on litigation, but over the years it evolved into environment and natural resource law, namely oil, gas, land and water.

A native of Corpus Christi Vaughan grew up hunting as there were a “jillion” sparrows that lived in the palm trees around his house. “I’d get after those sparrows with my Red Ryder BB gun and the starlings too, though they were harder to kill,” says Vaughan. He loved the outdoors. His family lived right on the bay, and on the weekends he would traipse out to the pier near Cole Park sit down with his pound of shrimp and catch fish.

Vaughan has long been an avid quail hunter and a lover of Brittany Spaniels, which he’s raised for 50 years. Hektor was his first, and now the last one is 11 year-old, Belle. “I had her spayed because I decided I wasn’t going to have others I couldn’t take into the field or be in my arms when I laid them to rest,” he says. He chose Brittanys because they’re “tolerable” house dogs and “wonderful” bird dogs.

Back in the quail heyday of the 1980s, it wasn’t uncommon when hunting from horseback to kick up 300 to 400 coveys over a long weekend. He still has a good number of birds on his country though the population is pretty cyclical. “The quail experts at CKWRI say it tracks the rain cycles, and I believe them,” says Vaughan. We still have some birds. If I could just get a rain, I’d have a lot of birds next season.”

Vaughan insists that future generations must not be allowed to experience the outdoors on their LED screens. “If we allow that to happen pretty soon we won’t have any outdoors. Hell, you can get an app to go bass fishing; you can probably get one for skeet shooting. “I know a lot of people who don’t hunt,” he continues, “but they still like to walk in the woods and hear the birds sing. I’m one of them.”

Vaughan’s family history is a storied one. His paternal grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Vaughan, one of 13 children, was an attorney in Greenville, northeast of Dallas. He also served five terms in the Texas legislature. Vaughan says his father never talked much about hunting with his own father though he remembered him talking about hunting and fishing in the Sabine River bottom likely on his aunt and uncles country. Vaughan’s maternal great grandfather, Robert Dougherty, immigrated from Ireland to the U.S. in 1847. He lived in New York and Kentucky before coming to Texas in 1860 where he settled in South Texas at San Patricio. Vaughan’s grandfather, James Robert Dougherty, born in 1871 and a contemporary of his Grandfather

*Ben’s passion for the past, present, and future of wildlife conservation is demonstrated by time in the field with his son James, his favorite bird dog and his father’s 1937 Model 21 Winchester 20 gauge that his mother gave his to his father on their first wedding anniversary in 1938 and bought for \$125. Ben brings that passion to the CKWRI where he has served on the Advisory Board for 33 years.*

## “I DON’T HAVE ANYTHING TO HANG MY HAT ON EXCEPT TO TRY AND SET AN EXAMPLE IN BOTH MY LAW PRACTICE AND THE WAY I LIVE AND THE VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS THAT I’VE TRIED TO SUPPORT”

Vaughan, was also an attorney and later an oilman. However, certified to teach at the age of 16, his formative years were spent riding horseback up and down the Rio Grande River educating families along the way. After that, his grandfather Dougherty spent two years at St. Louis University and then the University of Texas. Vaughan says his grandfather only had one year of actual law school. He got most of his training in the law offices of Lon C. Hill and James B. Wells. He was admitted to the bar in March 1895 and then subsequently set up his own practice in Beeville. “He was a fine lawyer, very well respected,” says Vaughan. “He argued cases in the U.S. Supreme Court.”

In *Brown v. United States*, Brown, an African American, was convicted of murdering an Anglo. Dougherty represented Brown, and in 1921 he took the train from Beeville to Washington to argue that Brown acted in self-defense. The opinion, overturning the lower court ruling, was written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. In essence it was decided that if a person is attacked and he believes he is in immediate danger, he has “no duty to retreat” and if he kills his attacker then he has “not exceeded the bounds of lawful self-defense.”

Dougherty began acquiring land in Jim Wells and Live Oak County in the early 1900s. He began piecing together the Lagarto Ranch, just west of Orange Grove, the first ranch of any consequence, in 1911. Sometime around 1946, he purchased another 23,000 acres in Duvall County for \$6 an acre. He ran cattle on the ranches throughout his lifetime. Dougherty also got into the oil business with W.E.

Hewit of David City, Nebraska. “The first well they drilled was a stinker,” Vaughan says. “It made maybe 40 barrels a day.” They owed \$5,000 to the drilling contractor, money which they didn’t readily have. Thus, they offered the lease to the drilling contractor in exchange for the amount owed. The contractor refused so they borrowed the money from the bank. “Two weeks later the offset operator brought in a well making 40,000 barrels a day.” Over the years, the team of Hewit and Dougherty brought in many more very lucrative wells in several different prominent fields throughout South Texas.

On the ranch in Duval County, Dougherty paid a dollar an acre for 1/64 royalty interest. There were 32 gates from the paved road to the gate into the ranch. “Dad said he went there one time with his father-in-law, but after opening 32 gates coming and going he never went back.”

The desire to get a good education has been passed on from generation to generation. When young Vaughan came of age, Rice University was the hardest school to get into “because it was free – room and board – everything.” Only two people from his high school class got in. He didn’t bother to apply. Instead he applied to Duke, Vanderbilt and Stanford and was accepted at all but ultimately chose Stanford because he’d never been to California. “I went there on a train.”

It was during a short tenure at the graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania where he was studying the classics that he met Daphne DuPont. They were married shortly thereafter and have been together almost 57 years.

Vaughan still has some of the country that his grandfather Dougherty put together though he did swap the Dougherty family's interest in the Duval County ranch for one in La Salle County. He still has the Willacy County country that his grandfather acquired as a 15 percent contingency fee which he earned when he assisted in the settlement of the Garcia and Yturria family controversy over their land holdings. Over the years he also bought land in Webb, Hidalgo, Frio, La Salle, Travis and Bastrop County to name but a few. He's always run cattle on the Willacy, La Salle, Webb and the Frio County ranches. "It's a tough go in the cattle business." Admittedly drought is something one lives with in South Texas. He was 10 years old during the 1951 drought that ended up lasting some seven years. He recalls going to the shoe store with his mother. "My mama bought a good pair of shoes that cost \$40, and I remember saying, 'Mama that's four good steers.'"

Vaughan is presently the longest serving member of the Caesar Kleberg Institute advisory board, dating back to 1987. He came to be involved because of his representation to the Thomas Marion O'Connor family. T. Michael O'Connor was a good friend of Billy Welder and Sam Beasom, then the director of the institute, and they approached Vaughan about serving on the board. He recalls their first meeting being held in the cafeteria on the campus of what was then Texas A&I University.

A few other fellow board members at the time included the late Ed Harte, Dick Jones and Jimmy McAllen, both of whom recently became Emeritus Advisory Board members. Vaughan served as chairman of the advisory board from 1989 to 1999. He takes being on the board to heart. "I have a considerable amount of symbiosis with the other members of the board," says Vaughan. "They, like me, love South Texas. They love the land, the cattle and the game. We all have sufficient resources, sympathetically, politically and economically to make a lasting difference to the condition of South Texas wildlife." Some years ago the couple made a donation to CKWRI

for the Daphne and Ben Vaughan Endowment for Birds of Prey, Songbirds, Shorebirds and Habitat Research. On caring for all things wild, Vaughan opines that each has a responsibility to ensure that the next generation has the same opportunities Vaughan and his contemporaries have been afforded to enjoy the outdoors.

He and Daphne live in the same home they bought when first moving to Austin. It is there that they raised their two sons, Ben F. Vaughan, IV and James Cullen Vaughan, whom he refers to as his "miracle child", as they had him late in life. Born in 1987, there's 23 years difference between the brothers. Like their father, both graduated from Stanford. Ben IV got his master's degree there as well and then went on to Berkley for a Ph.D. James graduated with honors from Stanford and then graduated from the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas. "I'm proud of my kids; they had a really smart mama," says Vaughan. "Equally important is their love of the outdoors and its preservation."

A genteel and humble man, Vaughan claims to have done little. To those who know him, it his love of all humanity that shines through. "I don't have anything to hang my hat on except to try and set an example in both my law practice and the way I live and the various organizations that I've tried to support," says Vaughan. "I've just tried to be where I was needed."

In 2013 he was diagnosed with stage four melanoma but thanks to new experimental treatments he is now cancer free. "I'm eternally grateful for that, but when I was diagnosed I said that 99.99 percent of the world's population had never had a day in their life as good as everyday of mine has been," he insists.

He says the rosary every morning on his two-mile jog through the neighborhood with his faithful companion Belle. "I've been blessed," he concludes. 