

# A Tribute to Joe Ball

by Jeff Stringer



Photos courtesy: Renee Williams

Joe Ball was truly a leader for family forest owners in Kentucky. He was especially driven to fight for the small private woodland owner's ability to benefit financially from their woodlands. This included pushing the forest industry establishment to provide market information so that the small owner had an opportunity to get a fair price for their timber resource. A formidable task, given that each independent mill has its own pricing system that they hold close to the vest. This did not deter Joe, and he was quick to the warpath when it came to pursuing the open marketing of logs. When this subject came up around Joe, the prudent course of action was to find cover as quickly as possible. That was a good thing! We need more people like Joe who have the knowledge and steadfastness to stand at the pulpit and fight for what they believe. In the same vein, he was unabashed at taking on the federal bureaucracy so that woodland owners could reap the benefits of federal programs.

If it was not for Joe, neither the Kentucky Woodland Owners Association nor the Kentucky Forest Health Task

Force—both now vibrant, functioning organizations—would be with us. The development of the task force was Joe's idea, and he pushed the idea until those of us who had the platform to develop the task force did. The Kentucky Woodland

Owners Association was nearing collapse as plans were being made to mothball the venture and try to resurrect it in some way, shape, or form. Joe recognized the plight and reluctantly volunteered to preside over the association. Through his sheer willpower and tenacity, he pulled it out of the ashes and turned the association around. There are other initiatives and ideas that he fostered; some worked, others did not. If they did not, it was not because they were bad ideas or ill conceived. It was because they were ahead of their time. In some cases they made too much sense for bureaucracy or the system to handle. But he was never deterred.

I am able to recount these events and many more, because I was close to the action when all of this unfolded. I fully supported Joe's visions for woodland owners and was in lockstep with his drive to see that woodland owners were (and are) treated right. Now, agreeing on how to get there was a whole different matter! Many times, those around us would think it might come to blows over how to construct an enterprise or what path to take to achieve a goal. However, what both of us always understood about one another was that we were fighting for the same goal and on the same team. I will always be highly appreciative of that. If I were picking my team to advance woodland owners in Kentucky, Joe would be the first one I would choose. Few can take his place, he advocated for so many that never knew or heard of him, and his thumbprint is on Kentucky. I miss him and always will.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jeff Stringer".



Joe Ball peeled back the bark of this ash tree to show Kentucky's Commissioner of Agriculture Ryan Quarles the damage the Emerald Ash Borer has caused to ash trees throughout Kentucky.