

Claude Davis
96 Years Old
Making a Career of Doing Things That You Enjoy

Some people have the good fortune to live enjoyable, successful lives after they retire from full-time employment. Claude Davis is surely one of those favored human beings.

After having grown up on a cotton farm in Morgan County, Ga., Davis flourished in multiple vocations and he shows no sign of stopping soon. He completed an outstanding 20-year service in the U.S. Navy in 1946, then moved his wife, Rebecca, and their daughters, Jane and Jo, to Santa Rosa County and resumed his career as a farmer.



At 96, Claude Davis possesses an energy and zest for life many younger men would envy.

World War II was simply another challenge that he had met. "We were only torpedoed twice," he notes with a chuckle. But the lighthearted comment belies his exceptional work. Davis held successive appointments as governor of Guam, a code operator for a destroyer squadron and a staff member at Pacific Fleet command headquarters.

"When I first came to the county, we still had people with mules," he said. "They were trading their mules for a Ford red belly. Over half the people in the county did not have tractors." Nearly every local farmer raised food animals. "Cattle and hogs ran loose" in an era of open range, Davis said. "In fact, you would be cruising along and the roads would be full of both animals." The manual labor at the time appears truly ancient compared to contemporary production standards. "I can remember picking 100 pounds of cotton by hand for 40 cents," Davis recalled.



Claude & Rebecca Davis and Children, Jane & Jo
Guam 1939

Given his previous experience and his gift for working with people, colleagues soon sought him out for leadership in the Santa Rosa County Farm Bureau. He was elected to the board of directors and later, was elected as county president and as a state director for Florida Farm Bureau.

He has not missed a county Farm Bureau annual meeting since 1948.

In 1956 he was appointed as Santa Rosa County's first Farm Bureau insurance agent. "After we formed the Farm Bureau fire insurance company, we needed an agent here," he explained. "Since I was retired, I was given the job. You did not need a license. "There was an old fire station in Jay," Davis recollected. "I cleaned it up and used it for an office. I paid the rent and hired a secretary."

The first policy he wrote was for life insurance. The policyholder, a father of a newborn, wanted a 20-year \$10,000 package. Davis collected a premium of \$330 for the first year of the policy. "That newborn has grown into a full-time farmer and is the current president of the county Farm Bureau - Jerry Davis (not a relative of Claude Davis).

But the pull of home was more powerful than the call of a new career. Davis left the office after a little more than six months so that he could be on his farm and with his family. "I didn't like the idea of being an agent," he explained. "I was retired. When the sun went down, I liked to be in my corner."

Since then he has managed herds of beef cattle and produced hay and soybeans. "I've done what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it," Davis said. "What I didn't do was no more important than what I did do, so I guess you could say I have been a farmer."

His current home is a structure built in 1868. Davis constructed the chimney after he purchased it and still maintains the entire farm property.

Throughout his career he also served as a volunteer leader in numerous community, civic and church activities. Just to cite two examples, he was an officer in his Presbyterian church for 46 years and held office as a Boy Scout leader for more than a decade. "They let me have

all of those good-paying jobs for as long as I wanted them," he exclaimed.



The home Claude Davis now lives in was built in 1868. It is a sturdy monument to the skill of the builders. The current owner maintains it and a hand-hewn barn.

The secret to his longevity and vitality, he says, is simple. "Don't do anything very long that you don't enjoy doing.

"Life is too short to get up on Monday morning and think that you will be so glad when Friday night comes around." He added one qualification: "Don't do anything to excess."

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