

TURKEY COUNTRY

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Maestro Bob Linder

Bob Linder, always in motion, is a man defined by drive.

A composer scoring Bob Linder's biopic would need to incorporate operatic and jazz themes, rousing Broadway musicals, a peppering of pop and country, and the amorous

turkeys everywhere. I came back to Houston ready to join the NWTF Houston Chapter, only to find it had folded. I met with the Sugar Land Chapter and the 'old guard' from the Houston one, that was about 15 or 16 years ago, and got it started again."

the Arkansas High School State Diving Championship in the early 1950s.

Linder also represented Arkansas in Junior Olympics tennis, attesting to his versatility. By 1964, Linder had earned a slot as a Tanglewood conducting student, under such

Conducting different instruments to attain harmony, the ability to work with disparate factions to reach accord, ideally suits Linder's current efforts with the NWTF.

yelps, purrs and clucks of a wild turkey hen followed by the heart-thrilling gobble of a lusty tom.

Huh?

Along with his decades of expertise in the music industry, including roles as student, teacher, mentor, dean, conductor and advocate, Bob Linder's insistent drive to contribute to turkeys and wildlife conservation — to do right for the resource and those who love it — reign over the talents he brings to his current role as NWTF Texas State Chapter President, after serving on the Texas State Board of Directors for the past 10 years.

THE PASSION

Linder discovered his passion for turkey hunting at age 55 at the coaxing of his brother, Larry, a longtime avid turkey hunter and NWTF member who has judged Arkansas State, Grand National and World Open turkey calling championships.

"I fell in love with it," Linder said. "Larry took me to Rushville, Mo., and there were



Bob Linder

The Houston Chapter currently has 25 committee members, as Linder took on the challenge of reinvigorating it with the same single-minded focus that has been his hallmark throughout his career: a defining drive that demonstrates just how fortunate turkeys — and all of us who love them — are to have Linder serving our mission.

WINNING WAYS

Linder hails from Crossett, Ark., where he excelled in both music and swimming, winning

masters as Thor Johnson, Pierre Monteaux, Ezra Rachlin and Max Rudolf.

LEADER OF THE BAND

Strolling through Linder's stone ranch house in Marble Falls, Texas, which he shares with opera singer-actress wife Diana, is like taking a blitzkrieg tour through the conductor's life. In one photo, an elegantly coiffed-and-attired Linder is shaking hands with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; in the next, he stands beside then-President George H.W. Bush. An autographed photo of



The author and Robert Linder are all smiles after a successful hunt.

Juliet Prouse here, a tuxedo-clad Linder leading Houston's Theatre Under the Stars there. Linder spent 25 years conducting Broadway-style musicals for Theatre Under the Stars, in addition to conducting the Houston Civic Symphony for 20 seasons and the Houston Municipal Band for 10. In addition, he was a guest conductor at Seattle's Fifth Avenue Theatre for nine years, twice conducted the Arkansas Symphony and has conducted television specials that have aired on CBS, NBC and PBS.

HEAD OF THE CLASS

Being a university dean is a challenging proposition regardless of the discipline, but being Dean of the School of Fine Arts, as Linder was at Houston Baptist University, has to be more like, well, herding cats: really far-out crazy cats.

Linder found his innate talent, so evident in orchestra conducting, also helped propel his efforts to strike accord among the university brass, other deans, and his faculty and students. Linder,

in his 25 years at HBU, put the students first.

"You can teach conducting technique," says Linder, "but you can't teach conducting."

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THE CONDUCTOR'S CODA

Although Linder retired from HBU in 1994, he's been anything but a typical retiree, infusing his effervescent energy into conservation efforts, as well as hunting and fishing. Fit and energetic in his early 70s, he gleefully recounts recently catching a world-class dorado on a Costa Rican fishing expedition he orchestrated for nine other anglers. This, after chasing turkeys 43 days out of a 48-day spring season, and cutting a new CD with veteran jazz saxophonist Larry Slezak, "No Worries."

For the past two years, he's served as judge at the NWTF Grand Nationals and as

one of the emcees, plus as a judge for three other calling championships: Texas State, Arkansas State and Bass Pro.

Linder's involvement with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has led to increased cooperative efforts between that organization and the NWTF. Linder will host RMEF President and CEO David Allen on a Texas turkey hunt in spring 2010, and offers himself up at RMEF auctions as a turkey guide/caller, with winning bids in the \$1,200 to \$1,400 range.

But it's the challenges he faces as NWTF Texas State President that consume most of his thoughts these days. "We're in an interesting time, a transitional time," says Linder. "We've reintroduced Eastern wild turkeys to east Texas over the past 10 to 12 years, but it's not taken as well as we'd hoped, so we're in the process of trying to figure out why, and we are trying other things, such as super-stocking, which we're doing at the Hornbeck Ranch in Lovelady, just east of the Davy Crockett National Forest. I'd like to see prescribed burns used more," adds Linder, "and we're working on better educating landowners and the public about the benefits of burning. NWTF also helps fund fully-equipped 'prescribed burn trailers' for trained TPWD personnel to conduct burns."

Linder serves on the Texas Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee that reviews proposed regulation changes and helps coordinate programs with TPWD, an experience that has given him insight into both the state wildlife agency and the legislative process.

Landowner seminars on managing ranchland for wildlife are also top-of-mind with Linder these days, with the Texas NWTF hosting events throughout the state. "We usually get 30 to 40 landowners per seminar," says Linder. "We coordinate the program among NWTF biologists and volunteers, and TPWD personnel."

"I've always been a political creature," shrugs Linder, who learned how to effect change from within the system from his years dealing with university presidents and vice-presidents while managing a creative menagerie of fine arts professors and students as Dean of Fine Arts. "You can't get it done if you're not at the table. It takes persistence, dedication and understanding to make wildlife politics work. Somebody's got to do it, and right now, I'm that person."

"Still, it's the friendships that come through NWTF that mean the most," Linder continues. "I meet people with shared goals, shared passions. That's what keeps me afield, from breaking ice at 8,000-foot elevation to hunt Merriam's in New Mexico to chopping palmetto in the Florida swamps to hunt Osceolas; that's my reward." — Susan Ebert