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Family Tradition

In 1970, Mr. Joseph Heiser, a past director of the Zoological Society of Houston, established the Alban-Heiser fund through the Houston Zoo to honor a "Texas citizen, citizens, or organization in recognition of notable contributions to appreciation and preservation of the earth's heritage of living creatures, their environment, their ecology, and their relation to human welfare."

This year, one of the Houston Zoo's Heiser Awards honors Chester Smith for his outstanding dedication and commitment to the protection and management of Sundown Island in Port O' Connor, Texas. Chester, by the way, is the grandfather of Jeremy Cecil, a Houston Zoo facilities employee who has spent significant time improving the Houston Zoo and the El Valle Amphibian Conservation Center in Panama.

Chester Smith became warden of Sundown Island for the Audubon Society in 1986, many years after his retirement from Exxon. Thanks to his tireless efforts, Sundown Island has been transformed into a sanctuary for the brown pelican.

When Chester Smith first came to Sundown Island, there were fewer than 10 breeding pairs of pelicans on the island. Chester set to the task of improving the island's habitat. Today, as many as 2,000 nesting pairs of brown pelicans call Sundown Island home. All along the Texas Coast, this federally endangered species could have Chester to thank.

Chester's motives are simple. He's not doing it for popularity; he just wants to help the birds and give something back to the place that he loves.

The Alban Heiser Award recognizes a notable contribution to the appreciation and preservation of the earth's heritage by a Texas Citizen. We are very grateful for Chester, his family, and the work that they do to help keep Texas' wildlife and habitat wild.

