

Hometown friends remember Tacha

By Gary Duda
Of the Kansan staff

SCANDIA — When Deanell Tacha was nominated two weeks ago by President Reagan to the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, her hometown was proud but not surprised.

Tacha, vice chancellor for academic affairs, grew up in Scandia, a small agricultural community in north central Kansas, where she went to a high school with an enrollment of about 100 students.

The town's 500 people are close, keeping track of each other's lives. Many of them knew Tacha as a young girl.

And they always knew she would go far, said Tacha's mother, Mary Reece. The only question was how far.

"They weren't suprised," Reece said. "They thought she would do something like that."

Earl Melby and Vernon Erickson, longtime friends of Tacha, said she was always "extremely peppy."

Vernon Erickson said Tacha was a good student who took the time to be friendly with everybody. He said that she was always fair to people around town and that he was sure she would use that same attitude as a judge.

Other neighbors, friends and family employees remember Tacha was honest and hard-working as a schoolgirl.

Earl Melby, secretary of the Reeces' construction company,

said he remembered Tacha as an energetic girl.

"I knew she was gonna go a long ways," he said. "She was a sharp girl."

The Reeces are one of Scandia's original families. The family construction company was one of the first businesses in the area and was responsible for much of the success in the town, Carl Larson, editor of the Scandia Journal, said.

Now that Tacha is in the spotlight, Melby said, it's probable that people will try to find something dishonest in her past. He said he wished them luck with Tacha.

"Here's one person they're not gonna find any dirt about," he said. "They might find some dust she kicked up though."

In high school, Tacha was active, involved in the marching band, cheerleading and playing the organ at church.

Reece said she never tried to push Tacha or her three other daughters but did encourage them to take advantage of opportunities.

"I've always felt that women should be educated and have something to do," said Reece, who received a degree in journalism from the University of Kansas. "I wanted them to be able to make choices. In growing up, I saw women in circumstances that they had nothing to do, and that bothered me."

Tacha, Reece said, has always worked hard, even as a child.

"But I guess she played as hard as she worked," she said.

Edna Robison, Tacha's first grade teacher who taught elementary school for 46 years, said Tacha was a special student and was a leader of her classmates.

"She was really outstanding," Robison said. "You could just tell that from the very begining. The students didn't resent her leadership. They just followed her ideas."

Reece said Tacha never needed to be told what to do. She had a knack for managing time.

"She'd always set her alarm and get up and practice piano before she went to school," she said.

Despite working hard, Reece said, her daughter knew how to separate her work from her family.

"She's a girl who's always been able to shut the door on work and go home," she said.

Reece, who is active in politics and travels around the country and world as part of her work, said she thought her busy life could have something to do with her daughter's.

"I suppose if you're active, that sort of rubs off on the kids," she said.



Here's one person they're not gonna find any dirt about. They might find some dust she kicked up, though.

—Earl Melby
Scandia resident

SCANDIA — Mary Reece, Deanell Tacha's mother, says the portrait behind her is her favorite photograph of her four daughters. Tacha is second from the right.