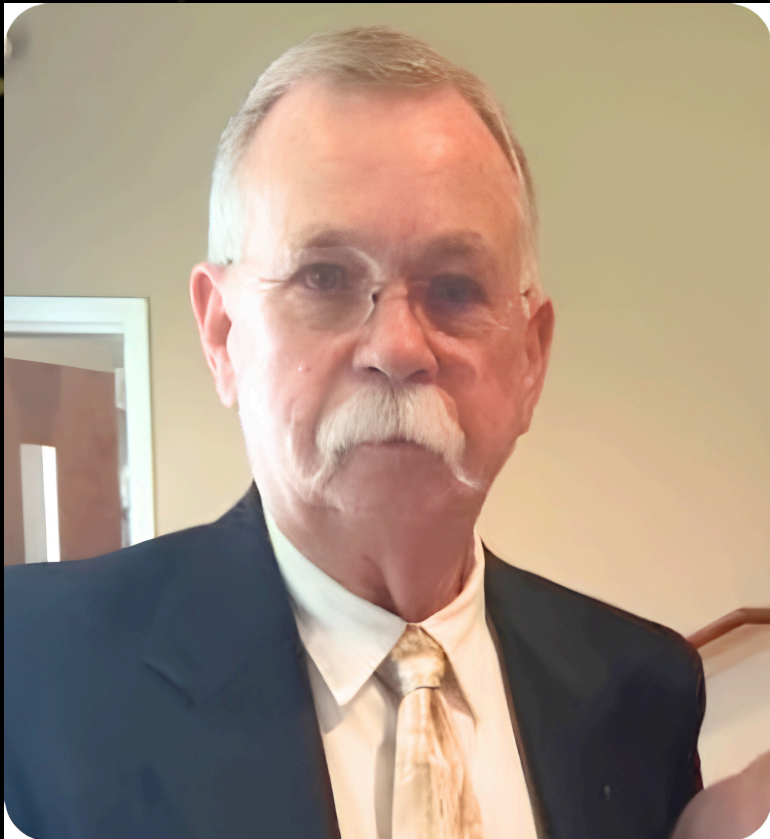




Laurel County Schools

Alumni Hall of Fame



Ernest Ray Rudder

“E.R.”

1965 Bush
High School

Ernest Ray Rudder, affectionately known as E.R., fondly described himself as a “Jack of all trades and a master of none.” Yet friends, family, and the community remember a man who mastered the art of devotion—one who loved his family deeply and dedicated his entire life to public service. A 1965 graduate of Bush High School, E.R. was a cornerstone of the Laurel County community, especially his beloved East 80 community. Although he passed away in 2021, his legacy as a dedicated educator, tireless first responder, law enforcement officer, and devoted family man continues to shape and inspire the region he loved so dearly.

E.R. believed deeply in the power of lifelong learning and excellence in education. After graduating from Bush High School, he attended Berea College for a short time before transferring to Cumberland College, where he earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology. Committed to his continuous growth as an educator, he later earned his Rank 1 in Education from Eastern Kentucky University.

For over 30 years, E.R. dedicated his professional life to nurturing the minds of youth in Laurel, Clay, and Jackson counties. He began his career in a classroom at Paces Creek Elementary, before teaching in Jackson County for a couple of years, and then coming home to Laurel County, where he would spend 13 years teaching chemistry and biology at Laurel County High School. E.R. shared his passion for science and sponsored the Science Club at Laurel County High School. His natural leadership, integrity, and steady demeanor eventually led to well-deserved promotions, including serving as Principal at Felts Elementary, Assistant Principal at Laurel County High School, and, for nine years, as Principal at Sublimity Elementary School until his retirement.

His public service continued long past his retirement from education. E.R. joined the Laurel County Sheriff's Office and, over 15 years, served his community with immense dedication and professionalism in multiple roles, including Administrative Sergeant.

E.R. was a man of extraordinary work ethic who balanced multiple roles to serve his community. While teaching full-time, he also drove a school bus for many years, managed the night shift at Burger Queen, and worked as a chemist for the London Utility Commission. Throughout it all, he remained committed to raising his family alongside his high school sweetheart, Judy.

Beyond his professional career, E.R. poured his heart into community safety and faith. He was a founding member of the Bush Fire Department and served for 46 years in nearly every capacity, including captain, firefighter, secretary, treasurer, and board member, protecting lives and property. On Sunday mornings, he could be found at Providence Baptist Church, where he was a longtime member. He served his church family as a deacon, Sunday School Director, and treasurer, while also lending his rich bass voice to the church quartet.

While E.R. possessed a sharp, brilliant intellect, he was perhaps best known for his legendary dry wit. He had a rare gift for using humor to diffuse tension, offer comfort, and bring joy to those around him, whether on a bus route or a stressful emergency call. E.R. never sought out praise or accolades; his focus was entirely on family, faith, service, and duty. Still, his profound impact could not go unnoticed. In 2024, his lifetime of bravery and civic dedication was permanently recognized when he was named to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation Roll of Honor.

Ernest "E.R." Rudder's influence on Laurel County is immeasurable. From the students he mentored, to the citizens he protected in times of crisis, to the congregation he sang with on Sundays, E.R. lived a life of service, humility, and dedication. He remains a shining example of what it means to be a true community leader.