



Sonia E. Bell was born in Boydsville, Arkansas to Ethel and Lester Spence. She was raised on a small farm in this rural community in Northeast Arkansas. She attended Rector public schools not far from her Boydsville community.

Sonia relocated to St. Louis after graduating from high school and getting married and worked as an ophthalmologist assistant. After moving back to Arkansas, she worked for Sheeks Lumber Company and then James Farm Center. She also worked in the Clay County Sheriff's office for several years. It was then that she was approached with the opportunity to be one of the first female Nationwide Insurance Agents in Arkansas in 1981. From there she went full force into building a successful agency in her small town of Corning. Sonia is considered a trailblazer blazing her own trail into being an agency principle in a time in the 1980's that women didn't own & run agencies.

In 1984 Sonia relocated to Conway to be closer to her daughter who was attending the University of Central Arkansas. Sonia married Jerry Bell of Conway and together they started another successful Nationwide Insurance Agency in Conway. Sonia was a sales agent and agency owner until March 1st, 2017, when she finally decided it was time to retire. Over the years her insurance industry involvement included her dedication and openness to learning by obtaining her Life Underwriter Training Council I & II designation. She went on to graduate the Mark Life College-Nationwide Insurance, Nationwide Life College and held her securities license along with her Life/Health and Property/Casualty licenses. During her tenure with Nationwide, she received numerous awards over her career. Sonia was awarded the Nationwide Insurance Presidents Conference Achiever, Women's Business Executive award, Challenger award, Pinnacle award, Champion award and the Distinguished Business award & Life Council Achiever award. She was a member of the North Central Association of Life Underwriters. She was consistently ranked in the top 10 agents in her region throughout her career for Nationwide.

Sonia was instrumental in bringing the Nationwide Insurance Prom Promise Program to several schools in Faulkner County with the message of the importance of drug and alcohol abstinence during prom and throughout the year! She worked hard to help educate and inform students about the realities of drug and alcohol abuse not only on prom night but the effect it would have for a lifetime. Sonia believed all the hours she put into this project was worth it if she could prevent one death on a prom night. She also aided the Conway Police Department in receiving field equipment to aid in their DWI work.

Sonia has been active in her Conway community for many years. She was a past member of the Conway Chamber of Commerce, served on the Conway Public Facilities Board and was a past associate member of the Faulkner County Board of Realtors. Sonia was a past member of the American Cancer Society; Business and Professional Women; former district director of the Arkansas Federation of Democratic Women, former National Public Relations Director of the Arkansas Federation of Democratic Women and former State President of Arkansas Democratic Women. Sonia was also a supporter of the Conway Boys and Girls club and the United Way.

Sonia also had a passion for identifying other females and encouraging them to consider the insurance business. Her daughter, Angela Bickford, followed her into the agency where they worked together until her retirement. She also involved herself with local area high school business

teachers to find interns before having an intern was cool as a way of introducing young people to our industry.

Sonia's philosophy in business was, "our customers are the most important people in our business. I feel honored they have chosen to do business with me and my agency. We will strive to meet and exceed our client's expectations." Sonia's philosophy in life was to live by the principles her parents taught her growing up. Those principles included honoring your parents, honoring the Lord and dedication to hard work. They helped me to understand that any success that I might enjoy in life will come from hard work, prayer and perseverance. This advice has served her well over the years!

Her greatest joy is spending time with her family and her "Nana" title. Sonia has one daughter, Angela Bickford and her husband Mark and their two sons Seth and Aaron along with her daughter in law Olivia and great granddaughter Stella.