

# Arkansas News Bureau

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## Person of the Decade in Arkansas

By John Brummett

LITTLE ROCK — We're ending not just a year, you know, but a decade. So media outlets are selecting their "persons of the decade," based entirely on subjectivity and without any clear rules. I like subjectivity and I positively adore the absence of rules. So here is one man's list of the persons of the decade in Arkansas, purely for argumentative purposes.

1. **Mike Huckabee.** He went from morbid obesity to running marathons, never mind that he might be edging back again. It happens, darn it.

With no money and no chance, but only talent, he won the Iowa Republican presidential caucuses and went on to finish second in the race for the Republican presidential nomination. If there's anything as remarkable as that a guy from Hope, Arkansas, would become president, it's that another guy from Hope, Arkansas, would turn around inside a decade and contend seriously for the presidency again.

Now Huckabee has an apparently successful national television show on Fox and he landed the late Paul Harvey's radio commentary gig. He was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for one of those books he cranked out. Letting a cop-killer go free may not even ruin him politically. But it probably will.

2. **Kris Allen.** Winning "American Idol," even if the gay guy was better, counts for a lot. It turned out to be a popularity contest, which played right into our guy's hands because he was a transparently fine fellow, gracious, humble and, some say, cute.

3. **Darren McFadden.** Twice he was a close runner-up for the Heisman Trophy. Never mind that the pro career has been a bust, leaving the surely false impression that he was the third best back on his Arkansas college team.

4. **Mike Beebe.** They say he's the best and most popular governor in the country.

5. **Houston Nutt.** He's gone, thank goodness. But he kept us thoroughly entertained for most of the decade, texting, e-mailing, chewing his nails, winning games he shouldn't and losing games he shouldn't.

6. **Bobby Petrino.** He may be bringing Razorback football back. He might be the best play-caller in the country. That compensates for the fact that he is devoid of any personality except on the practice field and on the sideline during games, when a personality emerges as one of monstrous derangement.

7. **Mark Martin.** One of the three or four best NASCAR drivers in the country for more decades than even this one, the Batesvillian ages seamlessly and competes vigorously for the tip-top even at 50.

8. **Damien Echols.** Celebrity forces worldwide, brought together largely by the efforts of his charming wife, rallied around his professed innocence and he became a very good Death Row media interview. He's going to walk free eventually, I'll wager.

9. **Ray McKinnon.** This is an Oscar-winner who lives just up the street from me. A native Georgian, this actor, writer, movie director and movie producer married an Arkansas girl, Lisa Blount, and together they won a short film Oscar for "The Accountant." He was one of the racist Alabama state troopers bothering Miss Daisy and Hoke. He ended the decade with a substantial acting role as the high school football coach in "Blind Side."

10. **Scott Shirey** — As the decade began, this was a kid out of Massachusetts trained in the KIPP charter school movement and dispatched to Helena to start a school for local fifth-graders that would keep these children in school longer and work them harder and put T-shirts on them declaring "no excuses." As the decade ended, that school thrived on Cherry Street for all grades, turning out college-bound Delta youth of dramatically improved test scores, and Shirey, firmly settled in Helena, became statewide superintendent for an eventual cluster of Delta KIPP schools, beginning this fall in Blytheville.

Do you think maybe I'm heavy on politics, sports, entertainment and pop culture? Business people and doctors get no respect here. If you know of any Arkansas lawyer who created a lot of jobs or saved a lot of lives during the decade, drop me a reminder.

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