

In Memory: James Bowie McCeney 1941 – 2016

By William C. Miller III—Bethesda, Maryland

It is with sadness that I report the passing of Jim McCeney at his home in Laurel, Maryland, on March 19, 2016 at the age 74 from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF). Jim was born on September 29, 1941 in Baltimore, Maryland, to Dr. Robert S. and Lelia Brennan McCeney. He grew up in Laurel, Maryland, in the house on the corner of Main and Fourth Street where his father practiced medicine for 57 years. After graduating from Landon School in Bethesda, Maryland, Jim earned a B.S. in Business Administration and Accounting from Washington and Lee University and subsequently became a CPA for Price Waterhouse & Co. From 1965 to 1971, Jim served his country in the Army Reserve. In 1971, he obtained a position in the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS), and for 22 years was the director of the Department of Financial Services. When he retired from the OAS in 2000, he was the director of the Department of Material Resources.



Jim met Barbara Gail French (Bobbi) at the beginning of his senior year at Washington and Lee. She was teaching school in nearby Goshen, Virginia, and lived in Lexington where their paths crossed. They were married on October 10, 1964 in Columbia, South Carolina. Jim traveled all over Latin America in his work with the OAS, and they both loved to travel. They enjoyed European river cruises and were frequent attendees at ASA national meetings.

Following Jim's mother's death in 1995, Jim and Bobbi acquired his family home on Main Street in Laurel and moved there from their house in Kensington, Maryland, in 1999. They set upon the task of repairing, restoring, and modernizing the 19th century house with the goal of maintaining the historic characteristics that were intrinsic to the house. The restoration included helping Bobbi revitalize the extensive gardens. Jim had a special interest in the Laurel Historical Society. His involvement in historic preservation extended well beyond restoring his family home to serving as the organization's treasurer, president, and chairman of the board. His other voluntary activities for the City of Laurel crossed many local government organizational lines. For example, he served on the city's Historic District Commission, the Pension Board of Trustees, the Community Emergency Response Team, and the Citizens City Police Academy Alumni Association. Jim gave of himself freely, and he touched many lives over the years.

I got to know Jim through Bobbi and their interest in the Azalea Society. I first met Bobbi in 1982 when she approached me at the conclusion of one of the Brookside Gardens Chapter's regular meetings at the Sligo Creek Community Center. I was a new chapter president, I didn't know very many people in the chapter, and this was a

conversation that I will never forget. To my surprise, Bobbi seemed to know a lot about me. After letting me "dangle" for several minutes, she explained that she too had attended Erskine College, a small school in South Carolina, and that she knew my parents from Erskine alumni activities. After knowing Bobbi and Jim for 34 years, Bobbi would be my candidate for the "Energizer Bunny Award" if there was one, and Jim was clearly her "force multiplier." They supported the Brookside Gardens Chapter with their time and talents and volunteered to help with the labor intensive chapter activities (e.g., flower shows, national meetings, and chapter picnics). It was through their efforts that our chapter held its juried flower show at the Landon School in conjunction with the annual Landon Azalea Festival. This was a major plus in our chapter's community outreach efforts. When I assumed the chapter presidency for the second time in 2009 and found that I needed a chapter treasurer, Jim agreed to take on the task. All of our major chapter activities involved contracts and required advanced planning, and Jim did a first rate job. His support made my job easier.

On a more personal level, Jim liked Bluegrass music, milkshakes, Laurel Tavern doughnuts, and Maryland basketball. A friend, who was familiar with Jim's activities in Laurel, described him as "a gentleman and a kind soul." I concur with that characterization. Jim made a difference with everything he touched, and one metric in particular says it all. On Tuesday, March 22, 2016, Laurel mayor Craig A. Moe issued a press release entitled: City of Laurel Mourns the Passing of James B. McCeney and ordered the City of Laurel flag lowered to half-staff.

Jim is survived by Bobbi, his wife of 52 years, his brother George, his daughter Margie, and his son Robert and his family.

Azaleas - Down on the Bayou

Thursday March 30 – Saturday April 1, 2017

Hammond, Louisiana

Host Hotel

Marriott Courtyard, Hammond, LA

\$109 group rate (available to book - December 2016)

Join us in south Louisiana in 2017 for great tours, a plant sale, socials, speakers and gardens. See the LSU AgCenter Hammond Research Station, Transcend Nursery (home of Buddy Lee), Bracy's Nursery, gardens in St. Francisville and more. Entertainment with illusionist David Himelrick.

FINAL SCHEDULE INFO and REGISTRATION

COMING FALL 2016!!

Contact Allen Owings at aowings@agcenter.lsu.edu or 225/603-8096 (email preferred)