

Leland Park

It's the laugh, isn't it, that tells us when Leland is nearby?

Whenever we think of Leland, we have to include a soundtrack because of that laugh that starts in his soul and rumbles out in the most infectious way. In fact, the Davidson Community Players should pay Leland to come to as many performances as possible of any comedy they produce. When Leland is in the audience, people can't help but enjoy the play even more.

Thank you, Leland, for bringing that laughter to our lives for all these years in Davidson. Plus so much more. Let's start at the beginning to try to understand where that laughter and life of service began for Leland Madison Park.

Leland was born in pre-Disney Orlando to parents who had settled there from Alabama and Georgia. Leland remembers the Orlando of that time as a great town where you knew your neighbors and where active citizenship came naturally. Both parents were deeply involved in their community. His mother was a first grade teacher who ran for and was elected to the School Board. Education was her life, along with her devotion to her son and husband, and she instilled in Leland the importance of learning for a lifetime.

Leland's father had degrees in business and law and agriculture, so it is clear that he, too, took education seriously. He was a fire insurance safety inspector and understood and related to people easily. Both parents left indelible marks on Leland and his life does honor to theirs.

In the tenth grade, Leland set out to the hills of Tennessee and the McCallie School, where he completed high school. The strict honor system there, rigorous academics, and religious affiliation prepared him for Davidson College with its mountains of reading and

required Bible study and Chapel. Several professors stand out in his memory. Jim Purcell made him write every week and gave Leland the gift of confidence in his writing. Sam Maloney was his faculty advisor and teacher. As Leland said, "Dr. Maloney took my old, rote, religious beliefs, tore them down. Then he helped me build them back up and develop my own faith, based on my own beliefs." And Chalmers Davidson taught Leland to love Davidson and to return to the college to seek his life's work. Leland is still close to members of Chalmers' family. Chalmers' granddaughter has a daughter and she is named Eliza Madison Shives, the Madison being for Leland.

Leland also learned a great deal about the town as a student. After the 8:00 Sunday morning service, Tom and Mattie Sadler invited over students to gather around their big kitchen table for breakfast. They would talk and laugh and tell stories about the town. Sometimes, they were talking so hard and fast that they spoke at the same time. Leland had to choose which conversation to follow, which frustrated him because they both had such interesting things to say about local townspeople and then, as now, he didn't want to miss anything.

When Leland graduated from Davidson, he worked in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Library System, where he did a variety of jobs throughout the system, allowing him to learn libraries from the ground up. Chalmers told him to go off, get a degree and then come back and work for him. Leland found that offer irresistible. He received his Masters Degree from Emory and came back to the area for about a year before entering the Army, where he worked for two years as an induction agent in Raleigh. He swore in everyone who entered the service from North Carolina's 53 eastern counties.

Leland returned to Davidson in 1967 as a reference librarian and it was that fall that President Grier Martin announced the building of a new library. It was Chalmers' goal to remain Director until the Library was completed, but he told Leland to go off again and get his PhD. This time Leland chose to matriculate at Florida State University.

However, Leland returned once a month to keep his hand in and help guide the building of the library, which was going to be more than a textbook library as the college grew in its research needs. He finished his degree and returned to Davidson in 1974 as Dr. Park. Good to his word, Chalmers opened the library and in 1975, stepped aside to allow Dr. Park to take over as Director of the Library. Leland was grateful that Chalmers didn't step too far away - just one flight up as College Archivist, making him available for consultation.

After that decision to return to Davidson College, Leland was Director of the Library for his 39 years, and he never once dreaded going to work. For over a decade, he was a faculty advisor for many students and a few organizations. He loved making those friendships and appreciates that they have kept in close touch with him. He marvels that one SAE and his kind wife even named their son Carr Madison Kinsey.

Leland valued the town that grew up over those years, as well. It was always a place, and still is in Leland's estimation, that you could get your arms around and know your neighbors and store owners, where relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. Russell Knox persuaded Leland to become involved the town's Community Appearance Committee, which evolved into the Historic Preservation Committee and finally into the Design Review Board. With over 20 years of service on those committees, Leland found it great way to meet people and to put his sense of appropriate design into action. He became known as the brick master, or maybe task master, because he knew such things as the color of the mortar made a huge difference in the way a building fit into town. He even took pictures of every column on campus because we do not have square columns in Davidson, and he insisted that builders show brick samples for every new structure.

Bricks took on a new meaning for Leland in 2010, when his participation made all the difference in the brick campaign to raise money to save our local branch library. As he

was 20 years ago in a previous library campaign, Leland became determined to make these bricks into the symbol of the town's determination to keep our library at our heart. With his significant help, the library committee raised enough money to keep the library doors open for even more days than originally planned. He also attended every meeting of the Future of the Library Committee to understand and then influence the proceedings. He has given his time and talent to many other organizations, as well, from the Arts and Science Council to his churches in Davidson and in Charlotte.

Leland's life has been filled with leadership positions on a state and national level, too, as President of the North Carolina Library Association; Chair of the State Library Commission, for which he was accorded the Order of the Longleaf Pine by Governor Jim Martin; Board member of the Southeastern Library Network; and as Editor of the "Southeastern Librarian," which was named the best library journal of the year during his tenure.

Leland, your hometown folks revel in all these great things that you have done outside of our town, but it is for your work inside the town that we honor you today. You have described Davidson as a special place where people know and care about each other, where they care about the town, where they can join in and participate and contribute new life and ideas. It is a place where we can grow up, and if we are lucky, grow old. You said that, even though you have no siblings and no kinfolk nearby, you have always had family. Your Davidson Family.

From your Davidson Family, today and always, we give you our thanks, our appreciation and love for the hundreds of ways you have shown us how to treat family. For your example of a life well lived, filled with generosity of spirit and noble purpose, as well as that beautiful laugh, we give you the G. Jackson Burney Community Service Award of 2011.

Thank you, Leland.

(Written with deep appreciation by Margo Williams, November 23, 2011)