

G. Jackson Burney Community Service Award
Davidson Town Hall, November 23, 2011
By Sam Maloney

I first met Jack Burney at a Thelemite Book Club party to which husbands were invited. Soon thereafter the *Mecklenburg Gazette* ran a picture and story of five men in the Soda Shop who in 1988 began meeting each Wednesday morning for coffee and to share their computer knowledge. The five men were Jack Burney, Jerry Hancock, Mack White, Winton Poole, and Jim Herring. Without embarrassment they called themselves WIMPS, a term from Jerry Hancock's fertile mind. WIMPS is the acronym for *We're Intent on Making Progress Slowly*. Jack Burney's witty and informative weekly newsletter bound the group together. The group advanced beyond discussing computers to include cell phones, digital cameras, Blackberries, and other expensive toys.

In 1994 I joined the group at the Soda Shop. This began a rare friendship for me with one of the noblest men I have ever known. For ten years I met with Jack and the growing number of WIMPS at 9:30 each Wednesday. Our meetings then were invariably followed by many of us assembling again for lunch at some restaurant. I felt honored that each week Jack in his van would pick me up at my home to go to these lunches. I treasured those drives with him. Jack told me about his childhood bout with polio and of his having lunch with President Roosevelt at Warm Springs, Georgia. As Jack aged adult post-polio syndrome gradually sapped the strength in his legs. He regressed from using one cane to two, from a three-wheel scooter downloaded from the back of his van to a Jazzy motorized chair and a van with a ramp. I never heard him complain. His indomitable spirit prevailed over his physical weakness. He reveled in his mobility and independence.

On those luncheon trips I learned about Jack's life in Charlotte before he and Anne retired to Davidson. He related his active involvement in the Methodist Church, his work with WBT/WBTV, the North Carolina National Bank, and the Chamber of Commerce. We talked about his love of jazz and the jazz bands for which he played piano at Charlotte's Central High School and at Chapel Hill, his friendship with Loonis McGlohon. Jack was a ham radio buff. Whenever we passed Jerry Hancock's office, he would get on his radio to exchange pleasantries with Jerry. Jack was also interested in me. For example, he would ask me what I had for breakfast. Then he would respond to my answer, "No, you must have three fruit at breakfast."

Jack shared information few people knew. He told me of meetings at the Industrial War College at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, D.C. where during the Cold War he received training to become a provisional leader in the event the USSR bombed Washington. Washington recognized Jack's capacity for leadership.

Jack Burney's interests in government and his people skills accompanied him to Davidson. He led with an easy grace. He chaired Davidson's Committee on Transportation/Circulation. He served on the Planning Board and the Land Plan Commission. He first suggested and then implemented *The Town Message* as a way for the officials of Davidson to communicate with the citizens of Davidson. We all benefit from that.

When Jack Burney died in 2004, his WIMPS friends suggested that Jack's services to Davidson be recognized. Mayor Kincaid and the Town Council enthusiastically endorsed a plan that would accomplish four goals: honor Jack, recognize the meritorious services of others, unite our village in a positive way, and benefit local charities. And, friends, that is why we are here with Jack's family this morning: Jack's wife Anne Burney, their son Mike and his wife Lisa. How many WIMPS are here this morning? The WIMPS have long since outgrown the Soda Shop. We meet in the conference room of the Village Inn each Wednesday at 9:30. Join us.

Jack Burney exemplified an exceptional model for community service, but each person who receives the Burney Award enlarges that model with greatly appreciated distinctive new elements of service. While we remember Jack Burney today, this is not Jack's day. This day is for those whom the Burney Award honors.

Before you leave take time to see the G. Jackson Burney Award memorial plaque in the hall. Artist Tom Clark created the bas-relief of Jack. Read the names of previous winners of the Burney Award. Today's winner's name has already been added to that notable list.

Sam Maloney