

The Morning Star

Monday, January 2, 2006

Area in 2005 lost some of its leading lights

Some local leaders, heroes and friends who died during 2005:

SAMUEL D. BISSETTE, 84 (Nov. 14): Longtime president and board chairman of Peoples Savings and Loan, he helped shape Wilmington's development. Late in life, he took up painting, devoting himself to documenting historical scenes and landscapes. The mosaic murals at Westfield Shoppingtown mall, showing area landmarks, were his design.

HERMAN BLIZZARD, 90 (April 4): Known as "Mr. Rotary," the longtime owner of Coastal Lighting Supply served as president of his local club and Rotary district governor. He compiled an extensive archive on Rotary activities, which was donated to UNCW in his honor.

WAYNE BRADLEY, 53 (May 18): The popular broadcast personality was a DJ on "The Penguin" radio and a host of the *Cape Fear Now* cable series.

JOHN BRIDGMAN JR., 79 (Nov. 15): Educator, longtime New Hanover County schools official and first principal of Wrightsville Beach Elementary School, he was also chairman of the Wrightsville Beach planning board.

DAN CAMERON, 83 (July 2): The businessman and developer was mayor of Wilmington in 1955 when the Atlantic Coast Line railroad announced that it was pulling its headquarters, and more than 1,000 jobs, out of the city. He helped organize and lead the Committee of 100, which recruited new industries and employers for the region. A philanthropist, he donated to and raised funds for the University of North Carolina

Wilmington and promoted the building of New Hanover Regional Medical Center.

KAREN COURTER, 40 (May 20): The much-loved fifth-grade teacher at Belville Elementary School died of heart problems shortly after leading a pep rally to boost students' confidence in test-taking.

THAD DANKEL, 62 (Nov. 10): A retired mathematics professor at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, he was active in the UNC Faculty Senate. Dankel was a past president of the Wilmington Concert Association and a volunteer with WHQR public radio, the Wilmington Choral Society and other arts groups.

GEORGE "BUCK" HARDEE, 78 (May 9): A longtime baseball coach and athletic director at New Hanover High School, he led 13 of his teams to conference championships and two to state finals. He also coached the American Legion Post 10 baseball team for 25 years.

PERCY HEATH, 82 (April 28): Famed jazz bassist, longtime member of the Modern Jazz Quartet and the Heath Brothers band. Born in Wilmington and educated at Williston Industrial High School, he served with the "Tuskegee Airmen" during World War II.

JENNIFER B. LEQUIRE, 54 (March 25): The local barber and member of the Kure Beach Town Council died after a long struggle with cancer.

MICHELLE KEELING OLIVER, 32 (Oct 6): The convenience store clerk was killed in a traffic accident on the way from the cemetery after the funeral for her fiancée, Dean Manning.

JAMES MITCHELL PRINCE, 36 (April 18): An auxiliary police officer for the town of Boiling Spring Lakes, Prince was killed in the line of duty during a routine traffic stop on N.C. 87.

BOB SAWYER, 82 (March 13): An architect, Sawyer designed, or contributed to the design of, the Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort, the Wilmington Hilton Riverside, the Shell Island Resort and many buildings at Cape Fear Community College, as well as the master plan for Southeastern Community College. He was a three-term mayor and a longtime alderman at Wrightsville Beach.

SGT. JOHN "MAC" SMITH, 22 (May 11): A soldier with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, he was killed in action while on convoy duty outside Baghdad. It was his second tour of duty in Iraq.

DOUG SWINK, 83 (Nov. 19): Longtime teacher and theatrical director, he founded the speech and drama programs at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and managed UNCW's Kenan Auditorium for many years. Many area actors and stage workers had their start through his long-running SRO/Straw Hat summer theater series at UNCW.

DR. DIANE WILHALF, 61 (May 20): Veterinarian and owner of the Just Cats veterinary clinic, she was a veteran of the Peace Corps.