

Mount Airy native still feels right at home

THOMAS SMITH

Jack Greenwood has seen many of the things he grew up with as a child in Mount Airy change.

But for all the ebb and flow of life Greenwood has weathered, the one remaining constant is the love he carries for his family, friends and hometown.

Father, brother, builder, Sunday school teacher and artist, among many other titles, Greenwood has been a face in the Mount Airy community for more than 50 years. He has been named as Citizen of the Year by the Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce, and in earlier years was named "Young Man of the Year" by the Mount Airy Jaycees.

As owner and operator of Blue Ridge Enterprises for nearly all of that time, Greenwood has put his mark on Mount Airy and throughout the southeastern United States.

Jack Greenwood was born Feb. 6, 1933, at the old Martin Memorial Hospital, now an apartment house, on Cherry Street. During his early childhood, he and his family lived at the corner of Arch Street and East Elm Street behind First Baptist Church.

Greenwood said during those years he remembers walking and playing around the dirt streets which ran through the town.

"I can remember the summer months that we just experienced lately, filled with the night sounds and the warm breezes and the old street lights out there on the street," Greenwood said while sitting in the parlor of his home on Robin Road. "Being able to walk down the street and have an ice cream cone at Gibson's Ice Cream Parlor or going to the movies at The Grand Theater, The Earle and the old Center Theater. Those are some of the things I remember."

Like anyone who lived through it, Greenwood said the onset of World War II dominated his adolescent years. He said he and members of his family served as air craft spotters, learning the shapes of the different varieties of enemy air craft by learning their silhouettes.

Greenwood said the realities of the war hit close to home as his brother, Wayne, served in the Navy and the Greenwood's next door neighbors on both sides of their home lost sons during the war.

"I remember it very vividly," he said. "Our evenings were spent listening to Gabriel Heatter on the radio and the news from London with Edward R. Murrow. We listened to the old Philco radio with twist dial. We were anxious for all of those who were serving during those times and we were on ration stamps for sugar, coffee, automobile tires, gasoline and all of those sorts of things."

In 1951, Greenwood graduated from Mount Airy High School and attended North Carolina State University, where he began his studies in the university's School of Design but quickly switched to the School of Engineering with a focus on construction engineering.

He said in hindsight the decision was a good one.

"It was a decision of mine because I think my creative abilities lacked something and I didn't think I would be another Michelangelo," Greenwood said. "So I thought I would get out of it and get into a field that I really enjoyed. I have mixed the two together and both of them developed and became a good asset as I continued my career as a builder."

Greenwood said he remembers the early days of the burgeoning North Carolina college basketball scene, with Coach Everette Case and players like Vic Bubas, who went on to coach against Case at Duke University just down the road. He said it was an exciting time to be a student at N.C. State.

Also during his time in Raleigh, Greenwood met his wife, Joyce, who has been by his side for 50 years this December. Greenwood said he met his wife through a mutual friend on a trip to Fairy Stone Park while she was in school in Roanoke, Va., at the National Business College.

Joyce and Jack have three children, Thomas and Todd



THOMAS SMITH/SIMPLE PLEASURES

Jack Greenwood sits at his drawing table in the office in his Mount Airy home. Greenwood said an influx of time following his retirement allowed him to become more involved with his art.



THOMAS SMITH/SIMPLE PLEASURES

Jack Greenwood and his wife, Joyce, stand in the living room of their home in Mount Airy. The Greenwoods will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary this December.

Greenwood and foster son Darren Martin. Thomas and Todd have taken over the operations of Blue Ridge Enterprises since their father retired and Darren is a pilot with American Airlines.

The Greenwoods are immensely proud of their children, as anyone who speaks with them or visits their wonderful home can tell. And for good reason. Todd was the first freshman quarterback ever to start for Virginia Tech; Thomas has become a successful businessman in the mold of his father, expanding and maintaining the success of Blue Ridge Enterprises; and Darren is a former pilot for the renowned Blue Angels.

After graduating college in 1956, Greenwood went on to serve in the Army for two years as a member of the ordnance corps. He served exclusively in the United States, stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland and Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

Greenwood said the experience helped to shape his life later on when he became a business owner. He said the concept of discipline and hierarchy were not lost to him following his time served.

"It was a great training experience from the standpoint of accepting and understanding responsibility and forming my opinion of running a business and to give me some background as to procedure," he said. "It was a great management step for me."

After he completed his time in the service, Jack and his new bride, Joyce, came back to Mount Airy.

"We lived on Willow Street in apartments owned by Dr. Charles and Dr. Ralph Sykes. I tell you these places but they have been torn down now, but I relate to them," Greenwood said.

Greenwood's father, Joseph Gordon Greenwood, was a building contractor himself, working as a small-town builder in and around Mount Airy. Jack went to work with his father in 1958 and by the next year, Blue Ridge Enterprises was a fully incorporated business.

Greenwood said the time period was good for being in the construction business. With the post war economy came expansion and jobs.

"After the war time, there came along a recovery peri-

od," Greenwood said. "People were still in a conservative mode, but at the same time, they started building and improving local buildings and local residences. After that, I got into a partnership with some others and was active in doing some smaller tract housing and, from that, it developed on into the commercial aspect of the construction industry and as time went on those partners dropped by the wayside and I ended up with Blue Ridge Construction company."

Blue Ridge Enterprises, as the company is known today, specializes in constructing commercial buildings focusing on church projects, banks, corporations, retail stores, as well as schools, town halls, fire stations and visitor centers. They are licensed to build in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee.

Now that Greenwood has retired from the building business he has a lot more time to focus on his hobbies. He is a life-long member of Central United Methodist Church in Mount Airy, where he continues to teach Sunday school, and serves on the church council and is lay leader.

He and his wife also split their time between their home in Mount Airy and a home on the North Carolina coast.

The beach offers Jack inspiration for his current occupation: artist. When entering the Greenwoods' home, many of Jack's paintings are proudly displayed. And they should be.

While Greenwood said he switched to engineering because of his lack of artistic ability, he is certainly being modest. To anyone who has a hard time drawing a stick figure, much less painting a beach scene, Greenwood has talent.

In his office on the lower level of his elegant but still modest home, Greenwood sits and sketches whatever his heart desires. On the day of this interview, he was beginning a sketch of his wife's father, using an old photograph to guide him.

Much is revealed, from an otherwise reserved man, about Greenwood's passions when looking at the subjects he chooses to paint. Depictions of family, nature and drawings with religious overtones come to the forefront. And it is these things which Greenwood will admit he is drawn to.

While Greenwood spends his time painting and being with his family these days, he has lived a long life full of experience and importance. But it is a testament to him that his pleasure is still found in simply drawing a small picture or spending time with his grandchildren and family.

While many things in Mount Airy have changed, just like in Jack Greenwood's life, the thing that remains the same is that pillars of the community, like Greenwood, are here to teach us that life is not about the end result, but about the love for a family, a town and a passion.

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THOMAS SMITH/SIMPLE PLEASURES

Greenwood is standing next to a painting he created of his grandchildren.