

Rees was an icon in the community

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STAFF REPORTER

Long-time business owner dies

Today Mount Airy mourns the loss of Floyd E. "Flip" Rees, a man whose successful business practices and tireless work to revitalize the community earned him the title of "icon" in the county.

Rees, 94, passed away on Monday morning after succumbing to lingering illness. In the wake of his death, community members are sharing memories of the man that had a lasting impact on Mount Airy.

"He was certainly an icon, one of the best citizens, community supporters and leaders that I've ever known," said Mayor Jack Loftis, who knew Rees well.

Loftis served with Rees in the Lions Club and worked with him on numerous projects in Mount Airy. Loftis

said, "There were not many charitable activities that he did not support.

"He was a very smart business man, very much into promoting the downtown area. He was just a fine Christian gentleman, and that's just about the best thing you can say about someone," Loftis remarked.

Johnny Bowman has been employed at F. Rees Company for more than 30 years. Rees opened the clothing store in the 1946. Bowman came to work there when he was just 15-years-old.

"He was wonderful to work for," Bowman said. "He was straightforward, honest, fair. He was liked by so many people. He was just such a unique person."

Since Rees passed away, Bowman has received numer-

ous calls at F. Rees from people who said Rees impacted their lives. Many people recall times when Rees would give them a suit and tell them to pay him back later when they landed a job.

"He was just an awesome person. He's going to be dearly missed by a lot of people," Bowman said.

Bowman attributes much of what he's learned about business to Rees. He likes to say he attended the "School of Rees." Rees operated F. Rees and other businesses downtown, buying more buildings in an effort to revitalize the area.

"He kept the town alive," Bowman remarked. "He loved people, and he loved seeing people do well in business ... I don't think there would be a downtown Mount

Airy without Mr. Rees."

Betty Ann Collins, president of the Greater Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce, echoed these sentiments.

"Downtown Mount Airy would not be what it is today without Flip Rees and the vision he had many, many years ago," she said.

Collins worked at Ellis Clothing years ago, and she recalled how Ms. Ellis and other local business owners had a lot of respect for Rees. She said, "He set an example for the other retailers."

The leader of the chamber remembered how Rees was always impeccably dressed. She talks about how professional and kind he was.

"He's an icon in the Mount Airy area," remarked Collins. "He will truly, truly be missed."

Rees was a native of Greensboro, where he attended Guilford College. He served as a major in the Army during World War II, receiving two Bronze Stars. His five years in the Army eventually took him to Texas, where he met and married wife, Marjorie. In 1946, he moved to Mount Airy and opened a clothiers, a dream he had had before serving in the Army.

There were five or six downtown clothing stores at the time that Rees opened his shop on main. Now decades later, F. Rees Company is still in operation on Main Street. Through the years, Rees undertook numerous business ventures. He retired a few years ago, turning over the day-to-day operation of several businesses and properties to his son, Gene.

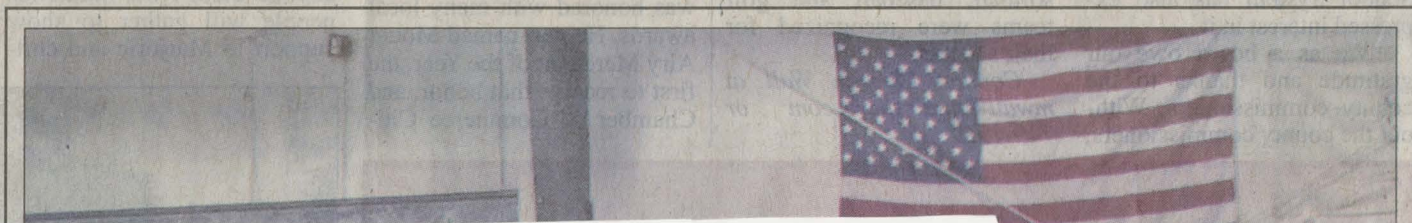


Floyd E. "Flip" Rees

Collins said, "They have continued that tradition that his father started."

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Viticulture moving on up at SCC



ICON:

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In addition to running successful businesses, Rees was active in downtown revitalization and the Main Street Program. He worked on the formation of Surry Community College, serving on the board for two decades.

During his lifetime, Rees was honored with many local awards. He was named Mount Airy Merchant of the Year, the first to receive that honor, and Chamber of Commerce Citi-

zen of the Year. He was inducted to the Mount Airy Sports Hall of Fame and received the Granite City Award. He was even honored in 2005 with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the highest civilian honor awarded in North Carolina. He received this award for his commitment to downtown Mount Airy and the community.

Bowman said Rees was always at the funeral home to show his support whenever anyone died. Now numerous people will gather to show support to Marjorie and chil-

dren, Susan, Gene and John, as they mourn their loss and also celebrate the life of Rees. Funeral services will be held on Wednesday at 2 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church in Mount Airy. The Rees family will receive friends on Tuesday from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Moody Funeral Home of Mount Airy.

Mayor Loftis made remarks about Rees in an Aug. 24, 2005, article in *The News* that sums up the impact Rees left in downtown Mount Airy:

"There was a time when

the downtown area could have gone the way of the ghost towns like many small town downtowns. But as buildings became vacant, he purchased and renovated them and got businesses back in them. He proved you can be successful in the downtown area without moving to the shopping malls or out of town. Now he's got a lot of help, but he was alone at the time we were at a crossroads."

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