

SUNDAY SALUTE

Dance, riding, music were West's passions

The Rev. John Frazier likes to say when God was handing out gifts, he lingered on Bill West.

"Bill was the sort of guy who could make you jealous," said Frazier, the pastor at St. Paul's in the Pines Episcopal Church.



Chick Jacobs

"He was so gifted in so many things, I said God just spilled some extra gifts on Bill."

West, who died Feb. 20 at age 69, was an excellent dancer, horseman and organist. In time, he taught all of them as well. It was his heart that gave out, not his passion.

"He was such an excellent dance partner and instructor," said Sunday Taylor McHenry. West worked with her at Roland's Dance Studio in Fayetteville for more than 30 years.

"Shag, ballroom — he loved to dance," she said. "Each one was a part of him, and he loved to share them."

West was born in 1944 on Fort Bragg to William and Lois West. He was one of 10 children, and he discovered his talent for both dance and riding as a teenager.

After a stint in the military, including a tour in Vietnam in 1966-67, West honed his talents as a rider and dancer, competing across the South. In time, he added organ playing to his passions, performing and studying with renowned maestros from New York City to Miami.

"He had a passion for it," Frazier said. "And he was serious in his study. But while he was very attentive to detail, he was a joy to be around."

"He had a concern for others and another rare talent — he would follow up. So many times people finish a task and move on. Bill would stick around afterward,



West

making sure everything was done as well as it could be, or to see what could be done better the next time."

In time, he became a riding instructor, primarily, friends say, to make sure the next generation of riders had a firm foundation in traditional riding.

"His talent led him to instruct others," Frazier said. "And he had the personality to teach without intimidating. He was sought as a judge of equestrian events because of his knowledge and attention to detail."

McHenry added that whether dancing or working in a furniture store, which he did in New York, "Bill was a great salesman. He exuded excitement about whatever he was doing."

About a decade ago, West began playing the organ for St. Paul's in the Pines. He continued to do so until heart problems forced him to retire.

Those same problems kept him off the dance floor, but West loved to stay around dance. In his last years at Roland's, he was an administrative assistant, and he continued to offer help to dancers.

"He loved dance," McHenry said. "And everyone loved him. He had a spirit that people could recognize."

Frazier spoke of that spirit as well.

"He could get mad, like we all do, but it never lasted," Frazier said. "He was an optimist, almost always upbeat. You couldn't spend time with him and still feel down."

"He took his faith seriously, and his music. But he loved people, and he loved to share that energy."

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