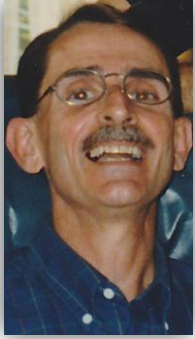


Remembering Harold Koon



In the early 1980, I took a year off between undergraduate and graduate school to work for a while in my adopted hometown of Charleston. I answered an ad in the classifieds for a position overseeing the restoration of the Joseph Aiken House at 20 Charlotte Street. It was a perfect match for both my education and experience. It also gave me a chance to stay for another year in my favorite city in the world. After about a year at 20 Charlotte Street, I was accepted to graduate school at Clemson University. The owner of 20 Charlotte Street ran another ad in the News and Courier to find a replacement for me. Many years later I discovered that the person who was ultimately chosen to replace me was a slight-framed, meticulously organized, work-a-holic who was born and raised in Newberry, South Carolina. His name was Harold Koon. This new job was Harold's introduction to Charleston and to the Mazyck Wraggborough neighborhood, where over the next 16 years he became a neighborhood fixture and an indispensable community volunteer.

When Harold and I met in 1996 we had a good laugh together when we realized that Harold had succeeded me at 20 Charlotte in 1982; that we had both been involved in many of the same community organizations at different times over the years; that we were both descendants of Adam and Mary Koon of Crane Creek, Richland County...and that even with all of those things in common, we had never met each other. We became great friends after that and like everyone else who had ever been friends with Harold Koon, I soon found myself swirling in the vortex of volunteer community service projects that were his life and passion.

Whether you knew him from his association with St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, The Metropolitan Community Church, The Mazyck Wraggborough Neighborhood Association, the Lowcountry Gay and Lesbian Alliance or his military reserve group, EVERYONE knew that if you wanted to get something done, Harold Koon was the guy to call. If you valued your organization's treasury you made him Treasurer. If you needed to "feed the flock", he could put something together in a matter of hours that anyone else would still have been planning a week later.

Until I later became close friends with his mother, I had no idea where or why he had learned to be this way. I can honestly say that everything he learned about hard work, frugality and community service, he learned from his incredible mother who instilled in her only child all the skills and discipline for which he is so well remembered by all who knew him...even to this day. Rule #1 was "Waste nothing!" He patrolled the streets of Mazyck Wraggborough every day cleaning up behind people and letting everyone know that someone cared about Mazyck Wraggborough. He led by example...and many other like-minded people soon joined him in whatever it was that he was doing at the time. He never waited on anyone to do that which was obvious to everyone needed to be done...he just got up and did it. We usually had a lot of fun doing whatever it was too!

Harold suffered a heart attack in early July of 1998 while taking his morning run along East Bay Street. The waiting room in the Critical Care Unit bulged at the seams with friends, co-workers and admirers who understood his value to our community and with those who could not imagine how he could ever be replaced. For several years after Harold's mother attended the annual presentation of the City of Charleston's Community Service Award, which through the efforts of Mayor Riley came to bear Harold Koon's name.

In this present age when we place so much emphasis on material things and efficiency, we should remember too that service given freely and happily to others is what sustains us and binds us together as a community. Harold Koon understood this and embraced it with a vigor that is seldom seen today. This city was so fortunate to have counted Harold Koon among its citizens. His presence and example have made a huge difference in our community. Those who have been honored with the award that is given in his name continue in that spirit and remind us never to forget our obligation to serve.

Charlie Smith of CSA Real Estate Services, Inc., a long-time friend of Harold Koon and his family, has provided a wonderful remembrance of Harold. Charlie stated, "this is for those who knew him and his dedicated work in the community while continuing to miss him. It is also for those who did not know Harold but can take inspiration from his remarkable story and become energized to make a positive difference in each neighborhood of Harold's beloved Charleston".