

Frank Taylor Wright, Franklin Street icon, dies at age 90

BY BETH VELLIQUETTE : The Herald-Sun
bvelliquette@heraldsun.com
Jan 24, 2008

CHAPEL HILL -- One of the secrets about Franklin Street's best-dressed man was that he didn't even live in Chapel Hill.

The man known for wearing incredibly bright colored suits and strolling up and down Franklin Street, Frank Taylor Wright, 90, died Monday at UNC Hospitals.



Bill Willcox/ The Herald-Sun

Frank Taylor Wright was well-suited to life on Franklin Street, where he spent countless hours drawing attention with his colorful clothing. Wright, also known as the Mayor of Franklin Street, died Monday.

Mr. Wright lived with his grandson, Larry Edwards Jr., and his granddaughter-in-law, Sheri Edwards, in Durham. Each morning, even if he wasn't feeling particularly good, the man universally known as Mr. Wright picked out one of his suits, topped it with a stylish hat, grabbed a matching umbrella and caught a bus to Chapel Hill.

"He always dressed beautifully, completely and artistically," Sheri Edwards said. "He said, 'Here's what I was born to do.' "

Franklin Street was where Mr. Wright received the love and attention from UNC students, business people and visitors. He brought life to Franklin Street, and in exchange, Franklin Street energized him, Sheri Edwards said.

"Even when he felt bad or sick, I'd say, 'Granddad, why are you going to Franklin Street?' " she recalled. "He always said, 'I have to or I would die.' "

It was common to see Mr. Wright near McDonald's on West Franklin Street or sitting at one of the bus stops downtown. One day, he might have on a pink suit, the next day, a neon green suit. He always turned heads.

Mr. Wright had more than 100 suits, Sheri Edwards said. His closet was stuffed with suits, and he had two portable closets also filled with them, she said.

"I can't even count them," she said. "The closet is jam-packed."

Mr. Wright loved the attention, and often told his family about the UNC students who asked to have their photographs taken with him. "He would be sitting on the bus stop, and they would come up to him and ask if they could take his picture," Edwards said. "They always would tell him how good he looked."

Mr. Wright, known to some as the Mayor of Franklin Street, cut out the articles and photographs that appeared in local newspapers and carried them in a briefcase.

One of his biggest moments came several years ago when Julian's, the clothing store then-owned by designer Alexander Julian, featured photographs of Wright in a special display and held an open house in his honor, Edwards said.

In recent years, Wright bought many of his suits at Greater Look's in Hillsborough. "He'd ask my husband to drive him up there," Edwards said.

Now the family has the sad task of deciding in which of his many suits Wright will be buried. "We're going to put him in a red one," she said. "We definitely want a bright color."

The funeral is scheduled for Sunday at 10 a.m. at Jones Funeral Home on Graham Street.

Because Wright had no insurance, the family is asking that if anyone would like to contribute to the cost of his funeral to send donations to Larry and Sheri Edwards at 17 Cedar Hill Drive, Durham, NC 27713.

© 2008 by *The Durham Herald Company*. All rights reserved.