



Donald R. Baker

September 28, 1936 - March 22, 2021

Donald R. Baker of Banner Elk, NC, passed March 22, 2021. He was born September 28, 1936 to the late Max and Grace Baker of Marion, VA. He was educated at Lees-McRae College, UNC-Chapel Hill, and East Tennessee State University. He worked in the art department at Delmar Printing Company in Charlotte after college before returning to Lees-McRae in 1960 as Director of Public Relations and Alumni Affairs. He also served as Sports Information Director and was in charge of media services. In 1989, he was named Vice President of Informational Services and Athletic Director. He served as Tennis Coach from 1961-1990 with a record of 508-150. He directed the Bobcat Tennis Camp from 1975-1990. Honors include induction into the National Junior College Athletic Association Football Hall of Fame in 2000 and the Lees-McRae Fred I. Dickerson Hall of Fame in 2001. He established the Coastal Conference Football Association and served as the Executive Director from 1972-1990. He received the Meritorious Service Award in 1992 for 20 years' service for Region X Director of the NJCAA. He retired from Lees-McRae in 1994 after 34 years of service.

He served as President of the Avery County Chamber of Commerce in 1984; was on the Region D Council of Governments, was named Outstanding Local Government Manager of Region D (2000-2001); and was a board member of the Avery Community Foundation from 2005-2010. He served as Avery County Manager (1996-2002), was recognized by Certificate of Appreciation by Governor Jim Hunt in recognition of dedication and outstanding service to North Carolina, November 28, 2002. He served as County GOP Chair from 2003-2018. He was named to the Martha Guy Hall of Legends of Avery County in 2014. He was a member of Mountainside Lutheran Church where he served as Congregation President from 2012-2019.

Survivors include his wife, Joyce Pierce Baker (also of Marion, VA) of 62 years; daughter, Nicole Crain (Bruce) of Fuquay Varina, NC; son, Rick Baker (Angel) of Mars Hill, NC; grandson, Kyle Crain (Jordan) of Fuquay Varina, NC; grandson, Jordan Baker of Mars Hill, NC; granddaughter, Alexis Baker of Mars Hill, NC; great-grandsons, Brodhi and Brayden Crain of Fuquay Varina, NC; brother, Duane Baker (Diane) of Mathews, NC; and sister, Darlene Ray of Charlotte, NC.

A private memorial service will be held for the immediate family at Mountainside Lutheran

Church. Memorial gifts may be made to Mountainside Lutheran Church at P.O. Box 235, Linville, NC 28646, or to Medi Home Health & Hospice, 1955 Newland Highway, Newland, NC 58657.

Words of Comfort and Memories may be shared with the Baker family by visiting our website <http://www.rsfh.net>

The care of Donald and his family has been entrusted to Reins-Sturdivant Funeral Home of Newland.

(828) 733-2121

Comments



“ Dear Joyce, Nikki and Rick,

I was saddened to learn the news about Coach Baker. Recently I was sharing with my son who is getting ready to start college in the fall as an athlete how important having a coach like Coach Baker would be to him. Coach Baker was not only an amazing coach who truly loved his team but was also an amazing person who would light up a room (and court) everytime he walked in. I remember meeting Coach Baker as a young high school student attending Bobcat Tennis Camp in the summers. My parents adored Coach and when he gave me the opportunity to play on his team alongside Nikki I jumped at the chance. It was the best two years of my college life. Not only did we work hard on the court but we had a lot of fun along the way. Coach was always encouraging and a wonderful role model.

Although we had lost touch over the years your family has always remained in my heart. Coach will be missed by everyone but his legacy for changing hundreds of lives will live on forever.

Much Love and Go Bobcats!

Tabatha Farmer Brantley
Class of 1987

TABATHA BRANTLEY - April 25 at 09:57 PM



“ To Joyce - please know my thoughts are with you as you manage your grief since Don passed away. I'm glad Donnie Williams and I got to see him not long ago at the Banner Elk Cafe. We had a great time sharing memories. As students of Lees-McRae we were lucky that you and Don were there when we were there. I've told many folks through the years since I graduated from Lee's-McRae that I had wished LMC had been a 4 year college. I had a great time there and received a solid academic foundation to start my journey in life. LMC saved me. Take good care of yourself in the days ahead. With love and care to you...Doug Shepherd

Douglas Shepherd - April 22 at 08:22 AM



“ Dear Joyce and family, please accept my condolences for the passing of my good friend and former classmate, Don Baker. Joyce, as you know Don and I went all the way through the Marion school system together and I always considered him a good friend. We shared a common interest in art and sports and I always enjoyed his sense of humor.. In reading the comments of former students and friends, he obviously made a wonderful impact on his students and his community. Rest in peace my good friend. Buddy Russell

Buddy Russell - April 14 at 01:44 PM



“ I have not seen Don in 25 years but I am thankful to him and Joyce for helping raise me when I was a baby at Lees Mcrae. He is a person that I will always remember for the rest of my life. He stood out in a crowd with his amazing personality. He probably gave me my nickname, Shane "RatMcrae". I was a rugrat in his office and follower of his Legacy. He will be missed. Thank you for your passion in life and your passion for people.

Isaac "Shane" Oakes - April 09 at 02:31 AM



“ Don was a good friend, I enjoyed competing with him in Senior League baseball. We had a lot of good times together. We are very sorry for your loss.
Cecil and Janice Beach

Cecil Beach - April 02 at 01:36 PM



“ Joyce and the Baker family, I had the pleasure of meeting Don in 1960 my first year at LMC. He offered me sound advice on many occasions in my two years. If Don and my high school Coach W. Boggs had not helped me, I would never made it to College! Don will be missed both in NC. and VA. Prayers for you and the family.



Leon Moore - March 29 at 12:12 PM



“ Don Baker was a special man of many talents. I played on his Tennis team from 1967-1969 as I was a walk on. He was a great Coach and leader of LMC. He will be sadly missed. In the past few years I had the pleasure of having lunch with Don and Joyce and sharing old Memories which are priceless. God Bless you Don, and your family.

Paul Elwood
Class of 1969

Paul Elwood - March 28 at 03:36 AM



“ Ralph Sproles lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Ralph Sproles - March 27 at 08:41 AM



“ I was in Coach Baker's 85-87 tennis team. Much more than just a tennis coach, he made me feel like family and gave me a base. I did not realize until later in life how important that was at that time. Thank you Coach. I will cherish many fond memories of you forever.

Alberico Menozzi - March 27 at 08:26 AM



“ Simply put, coach Baker changed my life! I wouldn't be where I am today or more importantly the person I am today if it weren't for coach Baker. He gave me an opportunity when I had no other opportunities. He was so much more than my tennis coach, he was my life coach. He was the father figure that I so desperately needed in my life. To the Baker family I want to say I'm so sorry for your loss and thank you for sharing coach with me. To this day I can still here the knock on my college room door at 2am and words from coach Baker "Boy, the cows are out" that meant it was time to go to work.

May you rest In peace coach,

Bobby Hendrix.

Bobby Hendrix - March 27 at 01:02 AM



“ I was shocked and sad to hear just now that Don has passed. My deepest condolences to Joyce, Nikki and Rick and to all the grandkids. I worked for Don and Joyce at LMC in the basement - cranking out news articles, banners, photos from the closet lab. I would help take care of Gretel when they were on vacation at the beach. Hamburger sandwiches! Don and Joyce always brought me a big bag of frozen shrimp. I learned so much from Don, and I was amazed that a married couple could work so well together. I loved them both. The kids were small and I often picked them up at school and brought them back to the "office." I felt like part of the family and loved every minute of it. I left when I became pregnant and we moved to Morganton after our daughter was born. Don designed and printed our baby announcements for us. Godspeed Don and may you Rest In Peace.

Rosanne Penley

Rosanne Penley - March 25 at 11:47 PM



“ I am proud to say that Don Baker was my friend. He was incredibly talented in so many ways--truly a 20th century Renaissance man. He also had the rare gift of self-deprecating humor. I treasure the many early-morning cups of coffee we shared as we slogged through the complexities of NAIA and NCAA eligibility certification. Thanks for the memories, Don.

Mary White - March 25 at 03:07 PM



“ Lisa Stamey lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Lisa Stamey - March 25 at 11:49 AM



“ My two years at LMC were made so much more enjoyable and blessed by having this incredible man as a professor. He was an amazing educator, friend and kindred spirit. My heartfelt condolences to his family as they grieve and remember this wonderful man.



Janine Hughes Cornell - March 24 at 11:04 PM



“ Greatest Art Appreciation teacher ever. Class of '74

Walter Williams - March 26 at 05:52 AM



“ Fondly recalling Don Baker from the mid-1970's! Wishing comfort for his loved ones.
Debra Sharp Christie - Class of 1976

Debra Christie - March 24 at 10:12 PM



“ To Joyce, Nikki, Rick and all the family, my thoughts & prayers are with you now & always!! Don shaped my life in so many ways, just in the 2 years I worked for him at LMC, the memories and life lessons he taught me are with me everyday! - Nollie Neill, Jr LMC 1980



Nollie W Neill Jr - March 24 at 07:41 PM



“ Richard And Bettie Shomaker lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Richard and Bettie Shomaker - March 24 at 06:38 PM



“ Carla Emerson lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Carla Emerson - March 24 at 11:48 AM



“ He was one of the best ! Condolences to his family , Amen Class of 76

Steve Zwirz - March 25 at 04:02 AM



“ Brenda S Hoss lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Brenda S Hoss - March 24 at 09:58 AM



“ David Rash lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



David Rash - March 24 at 09:25 AM



“ MARIE P SHIRLEY lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



MARIE P SHIRLEY - March 24 at 09:18 AM



“ Greg Andrews lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Greg Andrews - March 24 at 06:20 AM



“ One of my favorite people... Especially from the old Lees McRae days... Could always count on positive conversation and a light chuckle at the end...
A good friend ...a good man

Daniel Burleson - March 24 at 05:44 AM



“ Donna Calhoun Suazo lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Donna Calhoun Suazo - March 24 at 04:13 AM



“ Don was a great support and positive influence in life. May his journey beyond this human plain find eternal peace and joy.

May peace and the love of family and friends be comfort to Joyce and family in this time.

Greg & Gillian Pierce

Greg Pierce - March 24 at 12:56 AM



“ Coach Baker made a tremendous impact on my life. He had a rare quality to see the greatness in people where others saw the flaws. His influence on young people in a caring, giving, nurturing and clever ways was one of his many legacies. He was a man of many talents with a gift for making others around him feel special and a welcomed part of his family. He was my coach but so much more. I will never forget Coach Baker.

Randy Bloemendaal - March 23 at 09:23 PM



“ One of a kind. So very talented, so intelligent. Such a motivator. I'm forever indebted to Coach Baker and his family for all he did to help me as a student but later when I worked as Dean of Men at LMC. Evie Vaughn and Jeffrey Lytton graduated from LMC, my brother Jack was the basketball coach there later on. Don let my Dad and sister Juree catch trout from his pond while Dad was preaching in a revival at a local Church. The Lyttons thank the Baker family for allowing us to feel at home in their home for their support through the years. Blessed I am for having known him and for being classmates and friends with his brothers Duane and Darrell. Love and prayers for the Bakers . We love you Joyce, Rick, and Nikki.

steve lytton - March 23 at 09:21 PM



“ To Nikki and the entire Baker family, I am very sorry to hear of this great loss in your family..... I truly hope all of the great things Mr Baker has done for others will make the pain of your loss disappear. Just think of how many people's lives he impacted for the better.

I know that I can speak from a personal point of view that Mr Baker positively impacted my life and helped this young 18 yr old kid in 1986 become a positive force on the campus of Lees-McRae College. I am proud to say Mr Don Baker is part of the reason I am the man I am today. Most people are lucky to have 1 or 2 major influences in their lives, but I am able to say that I had 5-6 to look up to from LMC. THANK YOU Mr Don Baker for what you gave to me 35 years ago!!

This too shall pass.....

Love from Troy Vasos and family



Troy Vasos - March 23 at 08:57 PM



“ Humanity has lost a huge person. Don Baker--a man of many talents and abilities--will be missed. Other than his remarkable humor, he taught me everything I know about photography. I'm truly a better person for knowing and having him in my life. I will not say "goodbye" . . . but "hello" on a brighter day.

Phillip Teagarden - March 23 at 08:33 PM



“ The Holly Farms Player of the Game of Life!!!! RIP Coach!!! God's speed!

Garrett Stonesifer - March 23 at 08:23 PM



“ Hi Joyce, I am so sorry to hear about Don. You all have been and will remain in our thoughts and prayers! Doug and Susan



Doug Hall - March 23 at 07:46 PM



“ Lisa Daniels lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Lisa Daniels - March 23 at 07:16 PM



“ Clay & Naomi Houston lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Clay & Naomi Houston - March 23 at 06:39 PM



“ What an amazing man!! Praying for you Nikki and the rest of the family . Will be greatly missed.



vicki calloway strauss - March 23 at 04:44 PM



“ Joe, Priscilla, Joseph Trivette sent a virtual gift in memory of Donald R. Baker



Joe, Priscilla, Joseph Trivette - March 23 at 04:04 PM



“ Robert And Sheila Vance sent a virtual gift in memory of Donald R. Baker



Robert and Sheila Vance - March 23 at 03:19 PM



“ Dallas & Geneva Pate sent a virtual gift in memory of Donald R. Baker



Dallas & Geneva Pate - March 23 at 03:19 PM



“ Don Baker has been a great asset to Avery County. My prayers for his family at this time for Comfort and Peace.



Julia Jaynes - March 23 at 03:10 PM



“ So sorry Joyce, he was so good to me, love and prayers

Renee Dellinger

renee dellinger - March 23 at 02:48 PM



“ Don Baker was our friend and neighbor for almost 50 years. He was a man of many great talents. He was wise, witty, and had a wealth of knowledge that always amazed us. We will miss him greatly. Prayers for Joyce and the family

Bettie and Richard Shomaker - March 23 at 02:32 PM



“ My heartfelt condolences to Don’s family. Don was the best coach ever, he cared about his students and not about himself being in the spot light. Our loss is Heavens gain.

Millie G. Wiseman - March 23 at 01:49 PM



“ Don Baker was the best at everything he did. I am so sad to hear of his passing.

Robin Bentley Huggett - March 23 at 01:41 PM



“ Dawn Aldridge Poore lit a candle in memory of Donald R. Baker



Dawn Aldridge Poore - March 23 at 01:32 PM



“ A fine gentleman and a friend to the Smith family since 1960. Our prayers to Joyce and the Baker family. May the good Lord bless you and comfort you all.

Harry & Glinda - March 23 at 10:49 PM



“ Mr. Baker, the Mayor of Balm. He touched so many lives, including mine. Even though I came “from off” he showed me how to live in harmony with others in the mountains. I worked for Don & Joyce for 6 years. During that time I never once saw him lose his temper. He helped me find a place for my horse, told me who to talk to for hay, even introduced me to Mr. Hays’s Clydesdales and took me along when he would go to feed them. Whenever I would see him at the Post Office I would smile and feel so grateful to him for how he treated me. One memory that is ever present in my mind (may not seem like much, but it was HUGE to me), my horse had a foal who was very sick on the third day of her life. He told me to take the day to be with Ginger and Misty. I filled out a sick day paper to go with my time sheet for the week and he tore it up. I’ll never forget his kindness, loving spirit, and Bobcat pride.

Suzie Fisk - March 24 at 02:34 PM



“ A Bobcat Legend. His spirit lives on within the walls of Lees-McRae College and the relationships he created with so many young people along the way. Peace be with the family.

Craig McPhail - March 25 at 09:45 AM



“ Coach Baker will be missed! I had the privilege of being one of his tennis players at Lees-McRae College, where I had a great experience that I will never forget. Coach was a normal man that could communicate with the best. I appreciated everything Coach Baker and Fish did for me. I will never forget those two years with them. God Bless you Coach and your family!

Grover Gore II - March 25 at 11:53 AM



“ I first met Don Baker when I was a student at LMC in the early 1960s. He was in the know about everything on campus and was a great person to all of us students. In later life when my focus was to write books about mountain people, Don painted a cover for my second mountain book "Hemlocks and Magnolias," which I treasure. That painting was then transposed to the book cover itself.

When I was later a reporter for the Avery Journal and working in Avery County, Don was the County Mgr. and we had good talks and he was always so helpful.

This amazing man will be greatly missed in Banner Elk and throughout Avery County.

Rest in peace Don. To Joyce and all the family my best wishes.

Becky Ikerd Alghrary-McRee

Becky McRee - March 26 at 07:59 AM



“ Please accept our deepest thoughts and prayers for Joyce and the entire family. We knew Don for a long time at LMC and he will be missed. Clay and Pat Bentley

Clay Bentley - March 26 at 09:53 PM



“ Dear Joyce and your family. do you know how much Roger Biggerstaff loved both of you! He was such a good friend and help to Roger. His days to come to Lees Mcrae to see you all would always be ones he looked forward to. I always loved his Rudy Beggah pieces with Bertie! Love and prayers to all of you

and may good memories sustain you for weeks and months to come, Love Jolene

Jolene Biggerstaff - March 27 at 06:35 PM



“ To Don Baker's Family & Friends--I, just today, June 24, 2021, telephoned Lees-McRae for a copy of my LMC transcript of my college successes, a Sullivan scholarship student, from 1965 to 1967, and I asked about my PR-mentor, Don Baker. I was saddened to learn of his passing but the conversation brought back memories of working on campus in the PR department (work-study) at LMC, too. Know that my experience under Don Baker highly influenced my professional life as I departed campus and headed for Ft. Lauderdale where I was interviewed and hired upon arrival there by Bendix Avionics Division PR Director at the Executive Airport. Several years later I was selected to work for the Florida Legislature and joined the staff of State Senator Charles Weber, R-Broward Co., later moving to Tallahassee, FL and working for the President of The Florida Senate! These things wouldn't (I'm sure) have worked out so positively for me without (as stated above) the opportunity of learning under Don Baker's direction at LMC. I may have met Joyce back in the day and want to send her (and family members) my condolences at Don's recent passing. I want to express my sincere appreciation for meeting and working alongside Don BaKer (long ago as a student) at LMC.

Georgia Giltenboth Siena - June 24 at 02:48 PM