

# Dave Wilson - Street Sweeper And Town Santa

*"I like this job. I like the people here."*

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK  
Editor

I felt a little foolish, perhaps a little embarrassed, the first day he walked through the door in his red velvet suit and flowing white hair and beard.

He was making his rounds along Main Street, handing out Tootsie Rolls and lollipops to whomever he encountered on the sidewalk or in stores and business offices.

Dave Wilson, the town street sweeper and volunteer Santa, had a twinkle in his eyes that radiated from his weathered face. The candy rolled out of his massive working-man's hands onto the paper-strewn editor's desk as he asked if everybody in the office had been good this year.

I'll admit I felt flushed as I thanked "Santa" for the goodies and assured him we had been good.

The next time Dave came around, I was a little more comfortable with the situation. After all, there's still a lot of child in most adults, and there was something about this Santa that allowed that child to emerge again — even if it was for only a few moments. After that second visit, I found myself waiting for his return. "He hasn't come in today. Wonder when he's coming back?" It was almost child-like anticipation.

The following week Dave is back in his element — walking up and down the main street of Marshall playing Santa Claus. He loves doing it. You can see it all over his face, right through the cottony white beard that covers everything but his eyes, nose and cheeks.

Dave's used to walking Main Street. He's done it almost every day for the past seven years. He may be the only

bona fide street sweeper left in the state.

Born 70 years ago on Bailey's Branch — "Four miles out," he says — Dave's been in Marshall for the past 25 years. He gave up farming and moved to town to work with Bowman Funeral Home. At 63 he began working for the town, primarily as garbage collector and street sweeper, but town officials say he's an all-round handyman who helps the water and sewer department and does just about anything that needs to be done.

"I like this job. I like doing it," Dave says as he sweeps up cigarette butts, two bottle caps and a few scraps of paper at the curb in front of the Wachovia Bank.

It's 5:30 p.m. Thursday and it will be three hours later before he finishes both sides of the street along the business section and put his wheelbarrow, shovel and broom up for the night. Along the way, he stops in at Dodson's Grocery and talks for a few minutes with John and Doug, warms himself a bit and goes on his way.

Friday morning, he'll be up at four o'clock to start his rounds in the garbage truck. Mondays mean four o'clock too. Wednesdays, five.

Back out on the street, Dave says he likes Marshall. "I like the people here. If I didn't like it, I'd move on to someplace else."

He recalls how the town has changed over the years, how the Gulf Station used to stay open all night and how the drug store used to stay open until midnight.

"People use to walk to town, but there's more cars now. Use to; you'd see 14 or more people on a road walking to town after working on the farm all day."

But the cars thin out after 5 p.m., and the street again belongs to Dave and his wheelbarrow. By 7 p.m. the street is deserted and the whisk of his broom echoes off the walls and storefronts as his six-foot, lanky frame is silhouetted by a streetlight halfway down the street.

The temperature readout on the bank clock blinks what Dave feels on his face and hands as a cold front pushes over the mountains and sweeps along Main Street on an icy breeze. Dave says after a snow it takes a few extra hours to clean the street once the snow has melted. "There's a lot of salt to sweep up," he says.

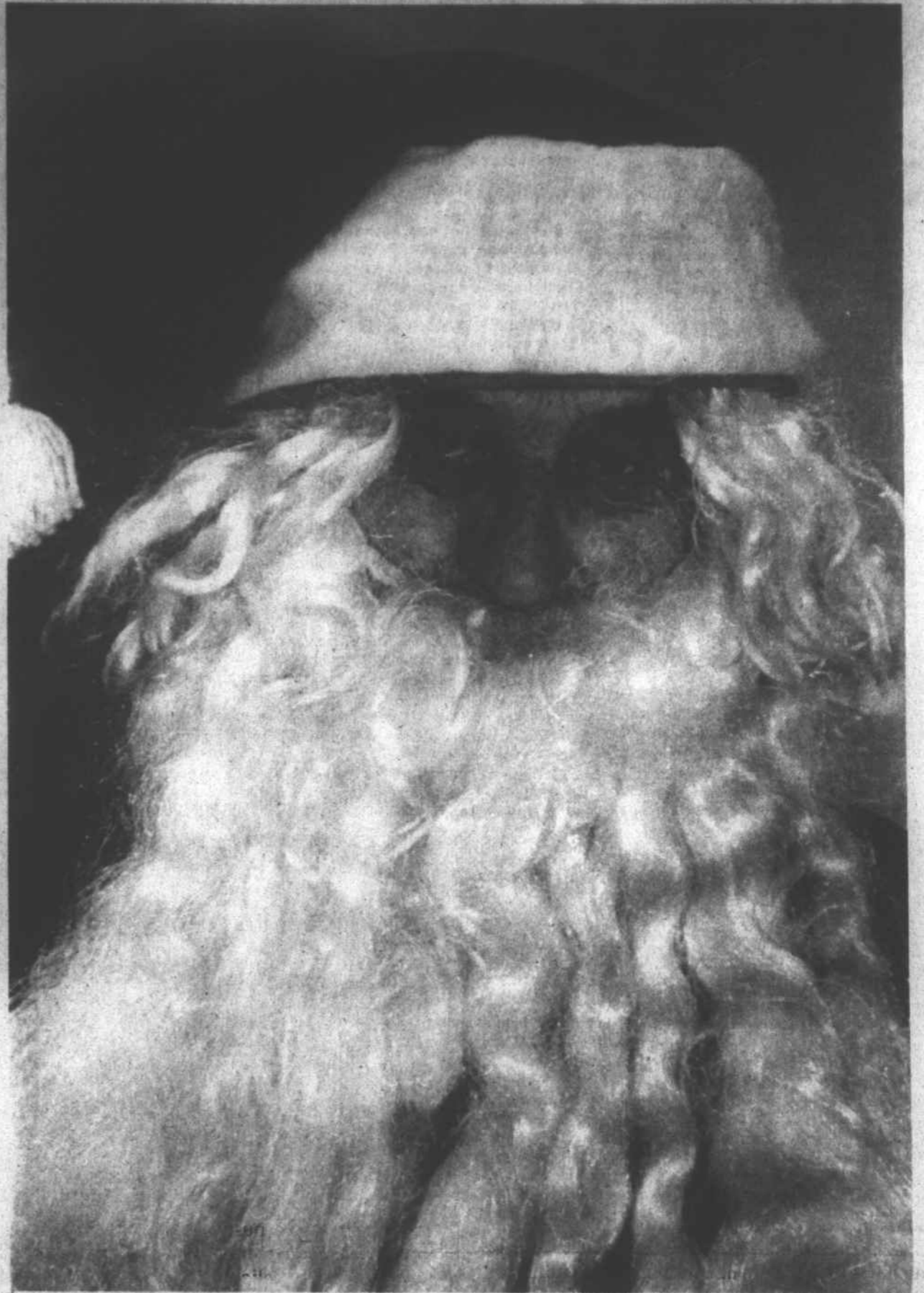
But the warm summer months are more enjoyable. It doesn't get dark so early, and folks will sit on the benches at the courthouse affording him an opportunity to stop and chat for a while. A time to recap the day's events in town as the daylight-saving sun settles between the mountains and over the French Broad River.

"Yeah, I like this place a lot. The people's awful nice here," he says.

Many of those awful nice people decided to pay special tribute to Dave this Thursday, Christmas Eve, by gathering in the town hall at 6:30 to honor him on the officially proclaimed "Dave Wilson Appreciation Day."

It's their way of saying "thank you" for his careful attention to the cleanliness of Main Street, for his toot of the garbage truck horn and patient waiting while they carry out last night's forgotten trash can, and for his cheerfulness as he plays Santa Claus for young and old alike during the Christmas season.

They've picked an appropriate time to repay Dave for the Christmas spirit he's given them the whole year.



Dave Wilson

Photo by M. Hancock

## Mountains Give New Shape To The Lives Of 2 Potters

By DOT JACKSON  
The Charlotte Observer  
Special To The News Record

The first months David and Jane Sibley Renfro lived up Big Pine Creek they lived in the barn.

"They had stored corn in the house," Jane says. "The ceiling was falling and we couldn't get the door open to go in. The barn was better off than the house."

David and Jane, both 29 and from Charlotte, met at Myers Park High School. They married at 18 and went on to school at UNCC, studying art. Eight years ago they bought 50 acres in the steep, narrow-coved mountains near Walnut.

"We had come to the idea that we wanted to live in the country," Jane says. "We just hadn't thought about this far out."

Everything they see from their porches is theirs. Their water comes from springs in their own bowl of hills.

No salesman is apt to call on them; the road to their place would be passed by as a rock slide, by most. Even a four-wheel drive vehicle grinds up it very slowly, brushing the laurels, dodging rocks.

Daughter Melissa, 2, rides her tricycle

freely about their traffic-free compound. It is still dark when Christine, 7, goes down in the morning to meet the school bus on the highway. A parent goes along with a flashlight. "The sun comes up on us on the way," Jane says.

Since David and Jane moved in, they've built a large pottery studio of two stories and basement, mostly by themselves, and a kiln for firing their highly individual mugs and pots. They've raked the corn stucks out of the house, installed electricity and plumbing and made a comfortable home.

The pottery, sold by Ivey's and through crafts shows and outlets like Charlotte's Southern Christmas Show, makes a living.

"The primary thing is to make as many pots as we can sell," David says. That means getting out to the shop by 6 a.m. and working all day before the fall marketing season, the heaviest production time.

Getting started, "We had help from my father's estate," David says. "If we'd had to break even the first year, I just didn't have the experience to do it. In the long run, I think we've come out pretty well. I've learned to put up buildings. When an appliance breaks

down up here, you don't just run it into town..."

Are they happy? "We go over that, between us," David says. "I feel like I've learned enough that I could get a pretty good-paying job in town. It's more work up here. It's hard getting a babysitter."

"At the same time, you get a taste for it. Sometimes we get worn down, and we say well, we could move. But I don't think we ever will..."

That first year, when they lived in the barn, Jane remembers, she was pregnant with Christine. One afternoon they went over the ridge to a neighbor's. "We went in the car. Dave had to come home before I wanted to so I told him just to come on, I would walk."

"I started out and I got lost in the woods. I thought I saw the barn roof, and I was so happy, and I came down — and it wasn't ours. So I tried to go back up the ridge, the way I'd come, and it was getting real dark. And finally I just started hollering. And then I saw David coming with a lantern, looking for me."

"From then on, when I saw lantern light shining through the cracks of the barn at night, I'd think, 'That's home.'"

## Avoid The Rush In Holiday Meals

Christmas Day is one you'll want to spend with the family, not constantly in the kitchen.

"Christmas meals with family and friends are more fun and festive without the last minute rush," says Mrs. Marjorie Donnelly, extension foods and nutrition specialist at North Carolina State University.

A little pre-planning and preparing of foods ahead of time can help you spend more of the holidays out of the kitchen, she notes. You can put into practice some tips and tricks which are fine for any time, but are especially useful during the holiday season.

Before Christmas week, get the whole family in on the planning. Plan for meals that the entire family will enjoy and delight in preparing. Make each member of the family responsible for certain

jobs now and later.

Plan grocery lists and shop early. And be sure all your cooking and serving utensils are in order.

Some things can be done before Christmas week. You can wash vegetables and fruits and store them in plastic bags; prepare bread for dressing, bread crumbs and cracker crumbs for casseroles and other dishes, cookie crumbs for pie shells and other desserts; make no-cook candies and spiced nuts and make fruit balls by mixing ground dates, raw prunes, raisins, dried figs and nuts.

Give your Christmas dishes that finished look with garnishes of parsley, turnip tops or other green leaves, carrot curls, radish roses, onion and pepper rings, tomato wedges, paprika, colored sugar, colored coconut and fancy fruits.

Blessings

Merry Christmas  
From All Of Us At

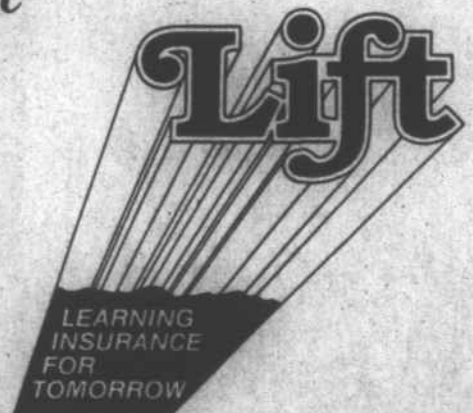
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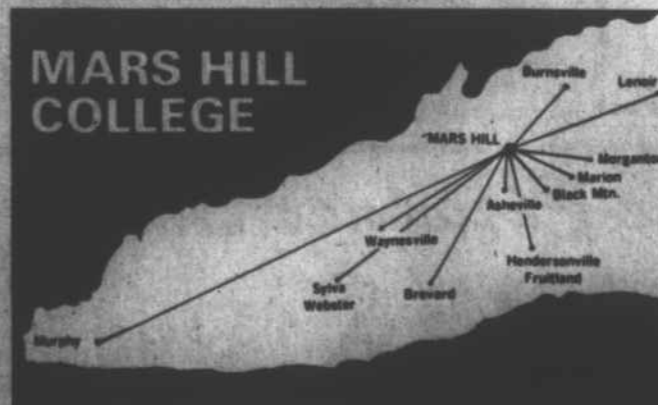
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