

## LOCAL NEWS

# Tribute to a Kings Mountain legend

## New Martin Marietta office building named in memory of Don Champion

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On Friday afternoon, the Cleveland County Chamber of Commerce had a ribbon cutting for the new office building at Martin Marietta Aggregates.

The unveiling of a plaque that will forever hang at the location commemorates the legend behind the building. It reads: "This building is dedicated in memory of Donald W. Champion for his 45 years of dedicated and loyal service to Martin Marietta Aggregates."

Don designed the building. It was his final project. Perhaps the most common trait people remember about him is his determination. "He could get something in his mind and there wasn't any stopping him until it got done," said his wife, Tammy. Before the building even stood, she said he had a sign staked where his office was going to be. He passed away just a few short weeks before it officially opened. The building stands as a lasting legacy.

Family and friends are left behind to grieve the loss of this great man. But his legend will live on through their memories, their stories and a plaque on the wall.

Don passed away on March 7, 2007 at the age of 64. But he didn't leave this earth without touching several hearts, enlightening several minds and influencing several lives. His friends describe him as an honest, humble man and dedicated worker. His mother-in-law Marsha Faile said he was "the best son-in-law in the world."

For Tammy, the man she married 20 years ago this past Tuesday was "one of a kind." She said, "They don't make them like him anymore. The mold was broken after he was made...He was an absolutely wonderful person."

Don was very intelligent. "As a ninth grader he beat out all of the upper grades in a spelling bee," she said, though he never flaunted his intellect. "He had a full-ride (scholarship) to Georgia Tech, but he turned it down because he thought cars and working was more important. And back then, college wasn't as big an issue as it is today."

In his younger days, Don enjoyed street racing his '57

Chevrolet. In addition, Don loved to work on cars. "He refurbished a '55 Chevrolet which I still have. That was a passion of his," she said. He also loved getting a plain car and "doctoring" it up, like the story behind his daughter, Danielle's, current car.

"Right before he passed, he was on a mission," Tammy said. "He wanted to get his daughter a more dependable car for college that would be good on gas, since she goes to NC State."

Don started searching. He wanted to have it in time for Danielle's Spring break and he finally found it in February. It was a plain car and Tammy feared it was too plain. But it wouldn't stay that way with the "doctor" on the job. He added chrome wheels, pinstripes, tags and bent shades around its windows. The car was not plain anymore.

When he was finished, he parked it in the garage and topped it with the big red bow Tammy used on top of the Christmas tree every year. When Danielle came home from Spring break, her new car waited for her to lift the garage door.

"Stuff like that is what made Don who he is, because he enjoyed doing stuff to make people happy," Tammy said. "He was a jokester, but not in a harmful way. He was always fun to be around because you never knew what he was going to do or get started. He just enjoyed having fun."

She added that he was always a gentleman to everybody. "Don was the type of person you'd want beside you the whole time."

In the early days, he was raised through hard times. He used to tell his family stories about catching birds on the window or when he would have to take his sister to the outhouse and the "spankings" he would get if he refused. "He knew where he had been (financially) and he didn't want to go back there," she said.

The Champion family moved to Kings Mountain, from Raleigh, when Martin Marietta was Superior Stone. His father started working there and the family has been here since. Tammy said Don's family was his life. He was a deacon at First Baptist Church and a very strong and dedicated Christian. Danielle remembers his great



The Champion family and friends stand next to the new commemorative plaque at Martin Marietta Aggregates that honors the legendary Don Champion. Front row, l-r: Larry Ward, wife Tammy Champion, and daughter Danielle. Back row, l-r: Wayne Paul, and sons Mark and Jody Champion.

sense of humor.

Don often put other people before himself, like the time he made sure his employees had Christmas bonuses during a tight year. He reached into his own pockets for them to have something that winter. Don also leaves behind two sons: Mark and Jody and four grandchildren. Jody also helped in the creation of the new building.

### QUOTES FROM FRIENDS:

"He never forgot where he came from and he never forgot where he wanted to go," said county Commissioner Johnny Hutchins. "He always appreciated his family and his friends."

"I know from his family, how much Don loved his family at home and his extended family here at Martin Marietta," said city Councilman Keith Miller. "I also know how important this particular project was. This site, on this hill, around these trees, with that view, Don thought that would be an important legacy for Martin Marietta and an important component for them doing business in this community."

"It's our hope that the building will stand for many years and that it will help us all remember Don. We just appreciate all that he did for us," said regional vice president of Martin Marietta



The Champion family stands next to the new commemorative plaque at Martin Marietta Aggregates that honors their husband and father Don Champion. Front row, l-r: wife Tammy Champion, daughter Danielle. Back row, l-r: sons Mark and Jody Champion.

Aggregates' Charlotte division Larry Ward.

Wayne Paul, production manager for Martin Marietta's Charlotte district said, "I've had

the privilege of working with Don for over 30 years...One thing about Don, you knew where you stood. He was a man of his word."