

Newt Hardie, Trees and Kudzu Coalition founder, dies

By Bob Montgomery

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Newt Hardie was remembered Sunday as a lover of trees, enemy of kudzu and one who left a lasting mark on the beautification of Spartanburg.

He died Saturday at Spartanburg Regional Hospice Home, surrounded by family members. He was 83.

A longtime employee with the Milliken Company, Hardie will perhaps be best remembered for his efforts to protect native trees from invasive species, especially kudzu.

“I clearly remember the time there was a retired Milliken executive who figured out a way to get rid of kudzu,” said Susan Dunlap of Trees Coalition. “My first thought was, ‘it’s impossible.’”

“As years went by, I saw on the side of the road that it was park-like. I thought, he’s doing it. Truly, I felt his goal was impossible. He made it a reality.”

Born in Inman, Hardie attended Georgia Institute of Technology on a naval ROTC scholarship and served in the Navy on a destroyer in the

See HARDIE, A6



Newt Hardie is shown in this file photo along the Mary Black Foundation Rail Trail. Hardie, known for his efforts toward the beautification of Spartanburg, died Saturday. He was 83. [ALEX HICKS JR./SPARTANBURG HERALD-JOURNAL]

HARDIE

From Page A1

Pacific from 1956-69.

He then returned to Georgia Tech and earned an advanced degree in industrial engineering, then worked for 41 years for Milliken and Company in Spartanburg and LaGrange, Ga.

He finished his career in Spartanburg as vice president of financial planning after leading Milliken's initiative in continuous quality improvement.

Dunlap said Hardie's employment at Milliken was a perfect match because of the late textile magnate Roger Milliken's love of trees as well.

In retirement, Hardie was an active member of the [Spartanburg Men's Garden Club](#), which founded the [Kudzu Coalition](#) in 2004 — which pioneered herbicide-free kudzu removal. In 2013, the group morphed into the [Trees Coalition](#), a nonprofit that educates and inspires communities to care for trees — especially those along city streets.

Over a year ago, Hardie wrote in the Herald Journal that his interest in kudzu started in 2001 with one cherry tree on South Pine Street that was under attack.

"Everyone thought it was a crazy idea because common belief held that fighting kudzu was hopeless — the invasive vine

was unstoppable and invincible," he wrote. "Better to pass it by on the other side and move on to something doable."

But he was determined to free the tree from kudzu without the use of harmful herbicides.

Until then, common practice held that the only way to kill the fast-growing, invasive species was to dig out the roots.

"After hundreds of tests, we proved that digging up roots was not necessary," Hardie wrote. "The evil invader can be killed one plant at a time by decapitating the crown — the source of all vines — from its roots. The root has no buds and cannot sprout vines."

He claimed his group eradicated kudzu from

41 sites and continued to contain it at 102 sites.

Hardie estimated that over the years he devoted 40 hours a week to kudzu, driving around with pruning saws and various gardening tools in the trunk of his car.

He received several awards for his service, including 2002 Volunteer of the Year from United Way of the Piedmont; 2009 Advocate of the Year for S.C. Council for Exceptional Children, Spartanburg Chapter; 2016 Volunteer of the Year for Hatcher Garden; and the 2017 Good Neighbor Award from Converse Heights Neighborhood Association.

Later this month, he was scheduled to be honored with the

Duke Energy Citizenship Award given by the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce.

Former Mayor Bill Barnet called Hardie "a really terrific example for all of us and a remarkable champion for this community — he will really be missed."

"Even in his 80s he worked tirelessly to focus on trees and the reduction of kudzu and cleaning up our neighborhoods, walkways and parks — all for the community and asking very little in return," Barnet said.

Leroy Jeter, president of the Highland Neighborhood Association, said Hardie was behind a major two-year kudzu removal project at Crescent Avenue and Forest

Street, and also one behind the Beacon restaurant on Beacon Street.

"The whole city is going to miss him," Jeter said. "I think he started the city beautification that's been done. A lot of projects are still going on."

Laura Ringo, executive director of Partners for Active Living, said Hardie was committed to making Spartanburg a better community.

"Newt Hardie spent his retirement years working harder than almost anyone I have ever met," she said. "He brought together neighbors, volunteers, faith-leaders and anyone willing to help to improve our community."

"Most recently he and his team cleaned up invasive plants on many of our beloved trails like the MBF Rail Trail, Cottonwood Trail, and Drayton Mills Trails. Thanks to Newt's commitment to community education residents like me know how to properly mulch around trees and how to identify and eliminate privet."

"Spartanburg is a better community thanks to Newt's passion, energy, and vision."

Dunlap added, "What a gift to Spartanburg."

The husband of Nell Elizabeth Barker, Hardie was active in the Presbyterian Church his entire life. He was first elected an elder at age 27 and served as an elder at each place he lived, most recently at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Spartanburg.

A Celebration of Life will be at 4 p.m. Wednesday at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 309 Fernwood Drive, Spartanburg. The family will receive friends after the service.

Floyd Mortuary of Spartanburg is in charge of arrangements.



Newton Gary Hardie



SPARTANBURG, SC—Newton Gary Hardie, 83, of Spartanburg, SC, died Saturday, May 5, 2018, at Spartanburg Regional Hospice Home, surrounded by family members. Born in Inman, SC, he was the son of the late Mary and Newton Hardie. He was married for 61 years to Nell Elizabeth Barker of Walhalla, SC.

Mr. Hardie attended Georgia Institute of Technology on a naval ROTC scholarship and served in the US Navy on a destroyer in the Pacific from 1956-1959. After his service, he returned to Georgia Tech and earned an advanced degree in Industrial Engineering. He subsequently worked for 41 years for Milliken and Company in Spartanburg and LaGrange, GA. Mr. Hardie finished his career in Spartanburg as Vice President of Financial Planning after leading Milliken's initiative in continuous quality improvement. This initiative culminated in the company being awarded the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for performance excellence by the President of the United States.

In retirement, Mr. Hardie was an active member of the [Spartanburg Men's Garden Club](#) and founded the [Kudzu Coalition](#), a group that pioneered herbicide-free kudzu removal. The organization expanded to become the [Trees Coalition](#), a nonprofit organization that educates and inspires communities to care for trees, especially those planted along streets. Through his fundraising

efforts, the Trees Coalition grew to include paid landscapers as well as committed volunteers who have had a significant impact on beautifying Spartanburg's streets, parks, and green spaces. In 2008, he received the National Spirit Volunteer of the Year Award given by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Later this month, he will be honored with the Duke Energy Citizenship Award given by the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce.

A man of great faith, Mr. Hardie was active in the Presbyterian Church his entire life. He was first elected an elder at the age of 27 and continued to be elected elder at subsequent churches in each place he lived, most recently at Westminster Presbyterian in Spartanburg. He loved serving others locally and through Westminster's mission trips to Peru.

Mr. Hardie is survived by his loving wife, Nell Elizabeth Barker; son and daughter-in-law, Dave and Marissa Hardie of Beaufort, SC; daughter and son-in-law, Lynn and Mark Springfield of Raleigh, NC; daughter and son-in-law, Sue and Charles Cate of Columbia, SC; and son and daughter-in-law, John and Adrienne Hardie of Atlanta, GA. He is also survived by 10 grandchildren. Mr. Hardie is predeceased by his parents and his sister, Sue Hardie Mitchell.

A Celebration of Life will take place Wednesday, May 9, 2018 at 4:00 PM at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 309 Fernwood Drive, Spartanburg, SC 29307. The family will receive friends after the service.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be given to the Spartanburg County Foundation, 424 E. Kennedy Street, Spartanburg, SC 29302.

An online guest register is available at www.floydmortuary.com

Floyd's North Church Street Chapel

