

The Long Rea

Island Packet Thursday March 24, 2016



Angus Cotton gets a kiss from daughter Caneel after she spoke on behalf of the Cotton family on Nov. 4, 2011, during the dedication of the Angus Cotton Academic Center at the Technical College of the Lowcountry in Bluffton. At right is his wife, Beverly Cotton.

FILE Staff photo

Island thrives with Cotton's 'hospitality'

BY DAVID LAUDERDALE



Picture Angus Cotton lecturing a group of puzzled employees at Hilton Head Hospital.

His hair needs a comb. His oversized glasses of the mid-1980s dominate a naturally friendly face.

He's got a piece of chalk in his hand. And with booming voice he's trying to teach hospital administrators "aggressive hospitality."

On that day, Cotton was in his heyday as a community leader. He was general manager of Marriott's Hilton Head Resort and president of the chamber of commerce.

He, John Curry and John David Rose had just brought a leery hospitality industry on board with Harriet Keyserling, the state representative from Beaufort, to enact a statewide accommodations tax to fund arts and tourism promotion. He'd just been part of another "impossible" task: loosening up the state's liquor laws to show better

hospitality.

Now, as we are saddened by Cotton's passing at 90 in his Sea Pines home on Sunday night, and as a new generation of Hilton Head leaders grope for a vision, we could still learn a lot from professor Cotton.

He came out of Chicago and Iowa — staying wherever the Depression was less crushing — to get a degree from the University of Iowa and a job in the food business. He thought he'd like working with food because he helped an eccentric uncle hawk hamburgers at Iowa county fairs. He went to work for John Patrick Harding, America's "Corned Beef King."

He then worked in the upscale Fred Harvey restaurants, where he learned the value of training but left with his greatest achievement, his marriage to Beverly. By 1963, he was recruited to run food and beverage for Marriott's four hotels. By the time he got to Hilton Head in 1980 to open its new oceanfront resort, the chain had 75 hotels, many of them set up with input from Cotton.

He learned "aggressive hospitality" at the knee of J. Willard Marriott, whose career began with a \$500 investment in a foundering root beer stand.

Marriott was a detail man, famous for "coaching and counseling" his managers and taking long walks with them over the properties, pointing out the smallest of shortcomings. He was a fanatic about cleanliness. He also was a people person, and each guest was to get the red carpet treatment.

Surely, the Hilton Head Hos-

“

HE URGED THE WORKING FAMILIES OF HILTON HEAD TO GET INVOLVED, PAY ATTENTION AND VOTE.

pital administrators were getting a heavy dose of Bill Marriott as Cotton pointed to the capital letters scrawled on the chalkboard: "STOIC." He urged them to treat patients like hotel guests. And here's how:

Select good people. Train often. Organize well. Inform staff. Control staff with positive reinforcement.

He also stressed "MBWA": management by walking around. Listen to your employees and guests — or patients.

Cotton felt that people needed to know what their business was and stick to it. "First thing you do is run the hotel," he said. "Do your job first."

For more than 30 years, we got to watch Cotton *live* this aggressive hospitality. He did it in a joyful, generous, upbeat way. It was a boon to Hilton Head, Beaufort County and the state as the hospitality industry surpassed textiles as South Carolina's leading enterprise.

"He's creative, knowledgeable and practical," said the late John Curry, his close friend and partner in caring deeply and lobbying hard for Hilton Head.

Those two treated everyone with respect. They were honest.

They were hard workers, much of it behind the scenes in subtle ways no one ever knew. They aimed for the highest standards. And when times were tough, they were at the grindstone.

Cotton was forever optimistic. But he warned of changes that needed attention as Hilton Head approached build-out. He said much of its second-leading industry of construction and development would pack up and leave.

In the mid-1980s, he said we needed to focus on the future — concentrating on higher education; low- to moderate-income housing; recreation; health and medical services; and transportation.

He and others worked hard on a "Town Center" that would give the island a central place for government, arts, churches and schools. It was to be part of Indigo Run, but the promised land, in the end, was not available.

He urged the working families of Hilton Head to get involved, pay attention and vote. He thought the stadium built by volunteers at Hilton Head Island High School could help unite a community that was a gaggle of gated enclaves. Maybe it lifted his spirits when 9,000 people were there last fall for the game against Bluffton.

He lobbied for resorts rather than low-end motels so Hilton Head wouldn't be like Anywhere.

People have forever labeled Hilton Head as a place of fat cats and wealthy "barons." Actually, it is a place of hard workers. None will surpass Angus and Beverly Cotton — he of the county fair hamburgers, and she whose first job was at age 6 picking beans for 3 cents a pound.

We shouldn't have to go to the hospital to appreciate the aggressive hospitality of Angus Cotton's life.

David Lauderdale: 843-706-8115, @ThatsLauderdale

'Community leader' Angus Cotton dies

He helped keep the RBC Heritage on Hilton Head

Career with Marriott made him a tourism industry leader for Lowcountry

Technical College of the Lowcountry dedicated building in his name

BY DAVID LAUDERDALE
dlauderdale@islandpacket.com

Angus Cotton, who left a mark on the tourism industry, the Heritage Classic Foundation and the Technical College of the Lowcountry, died peacefully in his sleep Sunday night at his home in Sea Pines. He was 90.



Cotton

"Angus is the reason we are here today," said Simon Fraser, chairman of the

Heritage Classic Foundation, which puts on the annual RBC Heritage Presented by Boeing on Hilton Head Island.

"He had the foresight for the board to put money aside in good times, and that reserve fund saved us in the year we had no title sponsor."

Cotton was the founding treasurer of the foundation, which was created in 1987 to stage the PGA Tour tournament when corporate bankruptcies on the island almost killed it. Cotton was instrumental in obtaining local letters of credit that kept the PGA Tour from moving the

tournament from Hilton Head.

Cotton came to Hilton Head in November 1980 as general manager of the Marriott oceanfront resort then under construction in Shipyard Plantation (today's Sonesta Resort). He was instantly a community leader.

He helped the late state Rep. Harriet Keyserling of Beaufort get the state accommodations tax approved, pumping millions of dollars into the arts and tourism marketing; he co-founded Leadership Hilton Head, Sea Pines Associates and the Greater Island Committee; he led the United Way and the chamber of commerce. He was a leader at First Presbyterian Church. He and his wife, Beverly, were honored together with the Alice Glenn Doughtie Community Service Award. In 1987, he was awarded the state's top award, the Order of the Palmetto, by Gov. Carroll Campbell.

Cotton also served on the TCL Commission for 20 years, 17 as chairman, until retiring in 2009. The main building on the TCL campus in Okatie was named the Angus Cotton Academic Center in 2011.

"He was one of these people who just always seemed to know the right answer," said TCL board chairman Art Brown of Hilton Head. "He developed leadership skills through the Marriott Corporation that are really hard to beat."

Brown, a retired U.S. Army four-star general, said, "Angus knew when



JAY KARR jkarr@islandpacket.com

RT

oft-shell crabs on the restaurant. ar delicacy, which has

here the equipment was stored backstage, then we the room a Scooby-Doo scan and take the guitar.

The guitar, a white left-handed Fender Stratocaster that was customized to play right-handed, is valued at \$10,000, according to a report from the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

The man reportedly left the bar in a silver Jaguar, which is believe to have been Uber'd.

The posts on the Roof-top Bar's page and on Frankenreiter's page had been shared hundreds of times as of late Monday afternoon.

SEE GUITAR, 4A

SEE LEADER, 4A

ISLAND PACKET MAR. 22, 2016