

# Island Packet co-founder, civic, business leader Wamsley dies

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Thomas F. Wamsley Sr., co-founder of The Island Packet newspaper and a former business, civic and church leader on Hilton Head Island, died Friday, Oct. 19, at Spartanburg Regional Hospital. He was 85.

He had been sick for a couple of years, said his wife, Betty. She said he finally removed his oxygen supply and told nurses, "I'm done. I'm finished. No more."

But it was a boundless, youthful energy that set him apart when the Wamsleys moved to Hilton Head in 1964, living in the first house built in Port Royal Plantation.

Wamsley came as a real

estate salesman at the Hilton Head Co., headed by island pioneer developer Fred C. Hack.

"There were certainly not many homes — and condominiums were just in the planning stages," Wamsley told island journalist Jim Littlejohn. "I sold lots — and believe me, taking people out for a walk over a lot that had not been cleared, worrying every minute about stepping on a snake, can make you into a salesman faster than anything I can think of."

At the Hilton Head Co., Wamsley found the late Ralph Hilton, a retired foreign service officer with a background in newspapers, who was trying to find backers for a weekly newspaper on Hilton Head.

"But a first fairly large group to whom Hilton

outlined his plan was skeptical to a point which Hilton regarded as insulting," Elizabeth Boatwright Coker wrote. "He found one man ready to help back the enterprise in Thomas Wamsley, a real estate salesman innocent of journalistic experience but young, energetic, and sanguine."

Hilton then recruited retired Raleigh, N.C., editor Jonathan Daniels and his wife, Lucy Cathcart Daniels, to the venture and the first edition was published July 9, 1970. Wamsley was president, Hilton the editor, and Jonathan Daniels was front-page columnist and "representative-at-large."

Betty Wamsley was a typist on a machine called an Adjusto-Writer when it took them six weeks to put



STAFF FILE

Thomas F. Wamsley Sr., center, with fellow Island Packet founders Ralph Hilton, left, and Jonathan Daniels.

together the first tabloid edition in a small room in the Dancar Building on Palmetto Bay Road.

Wamsley remained business manager and president until 1973.

But that was not his only business involvement on Hilton Head.

He organized and built the Hilton Head Golf Club in Shipyard Plantation and developed the Oakwoods

neighborhood on Hilton Head and the Fernlakes neighborhood in Bluffton. He was vice president of the board of The Seabrook, the island's first residential retirement community.

He was a partner in the Acuff-Wamsley construction firm. He owned and operated the Hilton Head Appliance Center, and sought an FCC permit for

a low-power television station on Hilton Head, again with Ralph Hilton as a partner.

Wamsley also was a community leader.

He was chairman of the Hilton Head Toll Bridge Authority, trustee of Sea Pines Academy, vice president of the Hilton Head Island Community Association, president and director of the Hilton Head Chamber of Commerce, and building committee chairman for the island's first stick-built library.

Wamsley was chairman of the board of deacons, clerk of session and treasurer at First Presbyterian Church.

The Wamsleys reared two children on the island, Leslie Bowen of Bluffton and attorney Thomas F. Wamsley Jr. of the Atlanta area.

Wamsley was a native of Round Hill, Va.

Betty Wamsley said services will be private in Charlotte, N.C.

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