

# Greater Kilmarnock area is a better place for the love of ‘multipotentialite’



Carroll Lee Ashburn has perfected the art of getting older without getting old. The active octogenarian turned 89 in July.

“I don’t feel a day over 88,” he said with a smile when I caught up with him a few weeks ago at the Kilmarnock Museum, where he serves as president. “I keep thinking I’m not gonna be able to keep doing [all of] this much longer.”

For the few folks who don’t know Ashburn, he’s the epitome of a ‘multipotentialite,’ a term coined in 2010 by career coach and author Emilie Wapnick. A multipotentialite is someone with many interests, talents and creative pursuits, any one of which could make for a great career for that person. There’s no better description for Ashburn. From coaching and umpiring to organizing festivals and parades and serving as the longtime radio voice of the Red Devils, Ashburn’s ubiquitous influence has been felt by generations.

The folks who do know Ashburn—and I mean really know him—will tell you they’ve never seen him wear shorts; that he still mows some of his lawn with a push mower; that he’s a proud father and grandfather; that more often than not when he goes into a business in Kilmarnock it’s to solicit volunteer help or funding for one of his countless projects; that he loves a good softball or basketball game but doesn’t care to watch wrestling or soccer; that when he’s passionate about something, he works tirelessly to make it happen, and that he has spent his life acting as an ambassador for Lancaster County.

“I don’t see anybody that could take his place,” said Kilmarnock business owner and museum board member Fred Burke. “He’s a unique personality. He’s more than a person, he’s a personality.”

He’s laid back and so calm, but he loves to celebrate this community and its people,” added Burke. “And if he latches on to an idea, he will make it happen, some kind of way. Whatever he’s doing, it’s always for the good of the community, not for his own glory.”

Ashburn spent 40 years as a car salesman in Kilmarnock for TD McGinnes but perhaps missed his true calling as a professional promoter. He officially “retired” in 1997 but is not one of those older adults who tend to become relatively inactive after retirement. In fact, his weekly schedules of acting as a tour guide, volunteering at the museum, broadcasting games, writing columns for the newspaper and

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by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

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organizing promotional events would tire most folks 50 years his junior.

But Ashburn hasn't done any of this for the accolades. In fact, he's very modest about his contributions to local athletics and the community.

"None of this stuff, I could have done by myself," he said. "And I just do it because I enjoy it."

The son of Zack and Gladys Ashburn, he grew up in Indian Creek and aside from a four-year stint serving his country, he never wandered far from his homeplace.

After graduating from Kilmarnock High School, Ashburn took the advice of friend Winter H. "Shorty" McCrobie and enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard, where he studied aviation electronics. "I was going to be drafted and Shorty talked me into the Coast Guard. I got to do what I wanted to do which was fly, and I love to fly." Every chance he gets, he still takes to the sky with Davy Nichols, owner and pilot of Coastal Sky Taxi.

A high school baseball and basketball player, Ashburn played in the Chesapeake League when he was on weekend leave. He also married his wife of 64 years Catherine while serving in the Coast Guard. When he returned to Kilmarnock in 1956, he played in a fun, yet competitive, fast pitch game between Rappahannock Record employees McCrobie and Sonny McCarty. It was from that game that the Kilmarnock Texaco men's fast pitch team was born.

Ashburn was a sometimes player, manager and coach of that team from 1957-72 and during that time brought numerous "show teams" such as the California Cuties, The Philadelphia Hobos, The Queen and her Maids and The King and His Court to area sandlots. The history and memorable team stories are chronicled by Ashburn in his book, *Tales of the Legendary Texacos*, which he published in 2015.

During the Texacos' heydays, Ashburn started the three-day spring festivals to open the softball season. The events included two parades as well as

the crowning of Miss Texaco. When the Texacos moved their home field to the Upper Lancaster Ruritan Center in Lively, his Fourth of July ballgames brought hundreds to a celebration that included beauty contests, picnics, swimming and a spectacular fireworks display. He contracted a group of synchronized swimmers from Richmond to perform in the Lively pool.

Ashburn even brought a rodeo to town to perform at the high school grounds in Kilmarnock.

"It was the first and only time we've had a rodeo here," he said.

When he became involved with the Kilmarnock Chamber of Commerce, promoting local shopping events with his Dog Days, Kilmarnock Days, Scottish Days and Rivahfest celebrations, he solicited clowns, dog trainers, impersonators and musicians to come to the area. The actor who portrayed "Cooter" on the Dukes of Hazzard made an appearance as did a very

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— Fred Burke



Carroll Lee Ashburn may be best known for his days as the coach and manager of the Texacos fast pitch softball team.

Carroll Lee Ashburn has spent his life as an ambassador for Kilmarnock.  
Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi

**A multipotentialite is someone with many interests, talents and creative pursuits, any one of which could make for a great career for that person.**



believable Barney Fife impersonator, whom a diner at Lee's Restaurant "was convinced was the real Barney."

Now remember, this was all before the internet and social media. Ashburn put boots on the ground in search of performers and talents to come to little ole' Lancaster County.

"Now, I go online, of course, but I used to just go to Christmas parades, events, check all the papers from around the state they'd have at the Record office, and everywhere I'd go I'd look for things or people to bring here."

Ashburn's love of softball, and sports in general, also led to him founding the Texettes girls softball team and coaching high school softball from 1957-61. Perhaps his most famous celebrity visitor was Lynda Bird Johnson, the daughter of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson and the wife of former Virginia Governor Chuck Robb. She came to Lively to throw out the first pitch for a Texettes' game.

He has spent much of his life umpiring, both as a volunteer with the Little League and for the Virginia High School League. He received a 30-year umpire plaque from Little League.

He also started the now popular Stars of Tomorrow Little League tournament, which brings thousands to Dream Fields every summer. The tournament was initially for girls softball only but it has grown under other directors to include baseball and now features teams from across the state.

He even created a mini olympics for Little League softball players with strictly softball-related competitions and held that event for 10 years.

As the organizer of Lancaster County Little League's opening day ceremonies for decades, he started the tradition of hosting a team from Saitama City, Japan, in an international exhibition game. He organized that for eight years.

For all his Little League-related efforts, the Carroll Lee Ashburn Field at Dream Fields was named in his

honor in 1990.

Forty-five years ago, he started his part-time radio career as a sportscaster for Lancaster High School's basketball games. He partnered then with Dean Loudy. He's still making that scary climb up the narrow ladder to the broadcasting booth at LHS, but now he calls the game alongside Demetrius Means. Over the years, he's broadcasted for three stations, locally for WKWI and WNNT, and for the Eastern Shore's WESR.

When Lancaster High's boys basketball team won the state championship, Ashburn jumped into action, doing what he does best, and organized a celebration with a parade through Kilmarnock.

When he hasn't been in the broadcasting booths, he's been on the court as a basketball referee for 20 years for middle and private school games.



Carroll Lee Ashburn serves as president of the Kilmarnock Museum.  
Photo by Lisa Hinton-Valdrighi



Even when his coaching days ended, Carroll Lee Ashburn was still on the field as an umpire. Here, he's discussing a play with CD Hathaway.

Photo by Yours Truly Photography

Carroll Lee Ashburn has been an advocate for our community his entire life. People like Carroll are truly unique. He serves our community volunteering countless hours for so many causes while never wanting or accepting any type of acknowledgement or accolades. He is truly irreplaceable.

—*Joe Hudnall*  
Kilmarnock businessman  
who has umpired with Ashburn for 35 years

"I can say, without a doubt, the community I grew up in is a better place because of Carroll Lee," said CD Hathaway of Kilmarnock, who's worked with Ashburn as a volunteer umpire and at the local radio station. "He's passionate about everything he does. He was a driving force behind my umpiring and I've always thought of him as a mentor."

Anyone who's ever seen the Kilmarnock Lighted Christmas Parade can thank Ashburn for growing the event to what it is today. "When I jumped in, it was small. But it grew to 100 units," he said.

He stopped working on the local Christmas parade about 10 years ago, but continues to volunteer with the Richmond Christmas Parade. He started helping with that over 35 years ago when it was organized by the Richmond Jaycees and his daughter, Gayle Stoneman, was chair of the committee.

"I love helping with that parade," he said.

The current president of the Kilmarnock Museum, he started the organization's biggest fundraiser, the Dance Extravaganza, 22 years ago. The show, which brought dancers, singers and performers from across the state for a night of entertainment, once included an appearance by a reigning Miss America. He also was the driving force behind the museum's Memorial Garden and Wall of Valor, which memorializes fallen first responders.

"You're not going to find anyone more dedicated to preserving that museum," said Burke. "He believes in memorializing things."

The museum board hopes to get funding to install an interactive kiosk highlighting African-American history of the area. Ashburn is spearheading that project.

He also founded, along with Dr. James Norris, the Fishermen's Memorial in Reedville. Dedicated in 2016 at the Reedville Fishermen's Museum, it honors the Northern Neck menhaden watermen who died at sea.

"I just like to do things to get people to come to town, a reason to visit," he said. "I still enjoy doing it and still work at it."

His weekly *Do you Remember?* pieces in the Rappahannock Record are

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—Carroll Lee Ashburn

"I've been doing this for several years," he said. "The activities directors are looking for things to do and I give them a list of places we can tour."

Many of the residents—many younger than Ashburn—didn't grow up in the Northern Neck or Middle Peninsula and are interested in local history.

For all of his years of service, Ashburn has an arm's length list of awards from organizations like the Red Cross, Shriners, Rotary, Jaycees, NAACP, DAR, fire departments and town governments.

The quintessential philanthropist, Ashburn proves you don't have to have a lot to give a lot. You just have to love what you do.

a favorite among readers.

Founder and member of the Lancaster County Sports Wall of Fame, Ashburn is organizing a second wall of honor for Northern Neck residents, this time one honoring those promoting and involved in the arts. An awards ceremony planned for fall to introduce the honorees has been put on hold because of the pandemic.

He has also volunteered with the annual Wings, Wheels and Keels event at Hummel Field in Topping. Many don't know he even managed a local rock band, the Immortals, in the 60s and 70s.

He recently resurrected on a smaller scale the shop local events, Dawg Days and Kilmarnock Days, sponsored by the museum and several business partners.

"I've decided I'm giving up umpiring," said Ashburn. "I stopped doing that anyway last year with all the sports being canceled, but the rest I'll do as long as I can."

In his spare time, he serves as a tour guide for residents at Commonwealth Senior Living in Kilmarnock and Rappahannock Westminster-Canterbury

in Irvington. He organizes tours of local points of interest—Windmill Point, Kilmarnock/White Stone/Irvington, Reedville, Morattico, Mathews County, Middlesex County. There's a church tour and a tour of a horse farm.

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—CD Hathaway

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### VISITING ANGELS

Jennifer Bowhey, Director,  
Northern Neck Middle Peninsula  
**68 S. Main St. • Kilmarnock VA**  
**804-435-2229**



Visiting Angels is celebrating its 15th year in the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula. Located in Kilmarnock, the company employs over 100 professionally trained caregivers across 7 counties. They help people stay independent and safe in their homes with a little extra help cooking, getting to appointments or remembering medication times.

Jennifer Bowhey and husband Steve are the owners, living a few miles up the road in Irvington, VA with two daughters. Being part of the local community is important; employing 100 caregivers and serving the families of the Northern Neck is fulfilling to Jen especially. The company offers Dementia Care Classes to the public and provides

help navigating for families in the area with care needs as they are full of resources to refer people to.

Watch for Visiting Angels staff donning angel wings at Halloween and passing out candy at local Halloween events. The Visiting Angels staff work closely with The Rivah store in Kilmarnock to help store and distribute giving tree donations to families in need each year and the staff at Visiting Angels love to dress up the windows at Christmas and other holidays. "We are so proud to try and spotlight this beautiful region and the people here nationally," Jennifer said. "This year we nominated one of our local caregivers for an award in care—she beat out over 20,000 caregivers around the United States and won!"