



DAVID LAUDERDALE  
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# Joe Fraser's lessons should mold our future

**W**ho's next? Who will care for Hilton Head Island now that the last of the original group that came to timber a remote island has passed away?



Fraser

Three Georgia families — the Hacks, Frasers and McIntoshes — sketched on this blank canvas a community that many still consider a work of art.

When Joseph B. "Joe" Fraser Jr. died March 13 at age 88, it symbolized the end of an era.

It was an era that turned the economic fortunes of a poor county. It helped push the state's top industry from textiles to tourism.

It helped focus a nation's attention on "ecology." The new heavy industry became people living in the woods and tanning on the beach, rather than a chemical plant spewing who knows what into the waterways.

It was an era when developers known as "benevolent dictators" lived and worshiped among their subjects, raising their children here and casting their personal worldly fortunes on the same concepts they were selling.

And for all its splash of big yachts and nationally televised golf and tennis, the era owes a lot to a quiet, steady, peacemaker named Joe Fraser.

Please see **LESSONS** on 4A

## LESSONS

Continued from 3A

### TRUST

Joe Fraser was the elder son of the primary investor in Hilton Head's rich timberlands, the late Gen. Joseph B. Fraser of Hinesville, Ga.

Joe came first to scout the timber in 1949, then to run a logging operation, and finally to help his brother, Charles, execute an unusual plan to turn a swamp into an upscale development called Sea Pines.

The Frasers had for generations been community leaders before ever setting foot on Hilton Head. They had college degrees and large tracts of land.

Joe's father was a U.S. Army lieutenant general who served in three wars. His father was a leader in the local and national Presbyterian church, Boy Scouting, civic clubs and business. He served as mayor, like his father before him.

Joe's mother was a steel magnolia, whose large garden was so impressive that Hinesville's school children marched up the street each spring to see it.

This family of four — the general and Miss Pearl, Joe and Charles — trusted, loved and supported each other throughout the high wire act that Hilton Head became.

Joe had to run family businesses early in life because of his father's military service. He also had to overcome polio. When others were relegated to iron lungs, Joe's doctor prescribed the opposite — exercise. He became a champion sprinter.

Unlike his brother, Joe was a man of few words.

"My role was to fire the boiler, not make the speeches," he once told me.

Yet people learned to listen carefully to his few words.

I was listening during his brother's funeral in 2002 when Joe stood beneath the Liberty Oak in Harbour Town and recalled their upbringing in a

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small town. He said they were taught to believe in God, honor their country, love their fellow man and have respect for the land.

### CHARACTER

The beauty of Joe Fraser was that he did not mind playing second fiddle to Charles, or the legion of Ivy League MBAs his brother hired.

"And he did it cheerfully, joyfully, happily and with pride," an old-time colleague told me.

Joe was known to be peaceful, compassionate and charitable. He was interested in people and their families. They say that everyone who ever worked for him was given something by Joe.

He was the ballast when the ship was teetering, something it did quite often. His greatest ability was to arbitrate and bring people together. That was never more valuable to the community than when he helped keep Hilton Head's PGA Tour event on the island, guiding the creation of the nonprofit Heritage Classic Foundation to stage the tournament today known as the RBC Heritage Presented by Boeing.

In the land where he once scouted for timber, he gave \$1 million for the new field house at Hilton Head Preparatory School. The building is named for the quiet man whose demeanor hid the steel that beat polio.

Joe Fraser's life tells us that those who care for Hilton Head in the future should focus less on profits and the limelight and more on service, character and preservation.

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MAR. 23, 2014



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## Joseph Bacon Fraser, Jr. 1926-2014

After a long illness, Joseph B. Fraser Jr. of Hilton Head Island, SC passed away peacefully on Thursday, March 13, 2014. He was born on January 27, 1926 in Hinesville, Georgia the son of Lt. General Joseph B. Fraser and Pearl Collins Fraser.

Following military service in the U.S. Army during WWII, he graduated from the University of Georgia with a B.S. in Marketing. After college, he joined his father in the family lumber business and was sent to Hilton Head Island, SC to manage the company's timber harvesting operation on Hilton Head Island, SC. After returning to Hinesville, Georgia and establishing Fraser Supply Company and Fraser Homebuilders, he returned to Hilton Head Island in 1964 and founded Sea Pines Homebuilders to construct custom homes in the new Sea Pines Plantation. In 1965 he moved his young family to the Island.

He joined his brother Charles at the Sea Pines Plantation Company in 1968, and over the next ten years led a very talented team of land planners, architects, engineers and construction managers as they developed some of the finest large scale resort and second home communities in North America including Sea Pines Plantation, Hilton Head Plantation, River Hills, Amelia Island, Palmas de Mar

and Kiawah Island. The Sea Pines Team was recognized nationally as the preeminent large-scale resort community developer when it received the "Citation For Excellence in Private Community Planning" awarded by the American Institute of Architects.

He is widely credited with being instrumental in keeping the Heritage golf tournament on Hilton Head Island and establishing the Heritage Classic Foundation in the 1987 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. This form of host organization became the model for the PGA TOUR. Under his leadership as Chairman until his retirement in 2006, the RBC Heritage Presented by Boeing and the Heritage Classic Foundation thrived donating millions of dollars to charity and creating one of the most popular stops on the PGA TOUR.

Among his many services and accolades, he was a member of St. Luke's Church and recognized as Citizen of the Year by Hilton Head Island's Presbyterian Men of the Church. He served on the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism Board, was the first president of the Hilton Head Island Homebuilders Association and was a member of the South Carolina Housing Hall of Fame. He also was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University of South Carolina Beaufort. He was Selectman Emeritus of the Midway Church and Society and a member of the St. Andrews Society of Savannah Georgia and a Grand Marshall of the Hilton Head Island St. Patrick's Day Parade.

He was preceded in death by his first wife Carolyn Bexley Fraser, his brother Charles E. Fraser and grandson Daniel West Fraser.

He is survived by his wife Jean O'Keeffe Fraser who he

married in February 1989, and his children Joseph B. Fraser III (Alice) of Bluffton, SC, J. Simon Fraser (Marilyn) of Hilton Head Island, SC, J. West Fraser (Helena) of Charleston, SC, Charles B. Fraser (Linda) of Hilton Head Island, SC and Carolyn B. Fraser of Charleston, SC, and by his ten grandchildren Elizabeth Laffitte (Spann), Clermونت Ripley (Al), Jay Fraser (Laura), Alex Fraser (Charlotte), Sarah Fraser, Elliott Fraser, Andrew Fraser, Rebecca Fraser, Carson Fraser, and Benjamin Fraser, and by great granddaughters Lowndes and Lucy Laffitte. Joe is also loved and respected by Jean's four daughters, Lorilyn Davis (Ronnie) of Winterville, NC, Holly Brower (Jon) of Winston-Salem, NC, Kimberly Edenfield of Hilton Head Island, SC, and Catherine Johan (Paul) of Tampa, FL; and his step grandchildren Shelby Brower, Seth Edenfield, Whit Edenfield, Carter Johan, Christopher Johan, Luke Davis, and step great grandson Eli Edenfield, all of whom affectionately called him "Papa Joe".

The family of Joe Fraser wish to thank the many caregivers and staff at Bloom at Belfair, Right at Home, and Tidewater Hospice for their kindness and care of Papa Joe over the last 12 months.

There will be a Memorial Service at St. Luke's Church, 50 Pope Avenue at 3:00 pm on Monday, March 17, 2014.

Memorials in honor of Joe Fraser Jr. may be made to; either St. Luke's Church, 50 Pope Avenue (Hilton Head Is., SC) or the Boys and Girls Club First Tee Project, 151 Gum Tree Road, Hilton Head Is., SC 29926.

The Island Funeral Home and Crematory is in charge of arrangements.

[www.theislandfuneralhome.com](http://www.theislandfuneralhome.com)

REMEMBERING JOSEPH B. FRASER JR.

'A man of uncommon  
*grace and humility*'  
Hilton Head Island developer dies at 88



File • Staff photo

Joseph B. Fraser Jr. enjoys the 2008 Verizon Heritage at Harbour Town Golf Links on Hilton Head Island.

By DAN BURLEY • [dburley@islandpacket.com](mailto:dburley@islandpacket.com) • 843-706-8142

Joseph B. Fraser Jr., who with his brother, Charles, shaped modern Hilton Head Island, died Thursday night.

He was 88.

Fraser died of natural causes at Bloom at Belfair senior living community in greater Bluffton. His health had been in steady decline during the past year, his son, Joseph Fraser III, said.

Along with his brother, Joseph Fraser Jr. was a guiding force in Hilton Head's evolution from a sparsely populated forest into a busy island community. He also was instrumental in starting the island's signature sporting event, the Heritage Classic golf tournament, in 1969.

#### FRASER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

- Helped start the island's signature sporting event, the **Heritage Classic golf tournament**, in 1969.
- Developed **Sea Pines Plantation** with his brother Charles.
- Developed **Hilton Head Plantation**.
- Became senior vice president for **Sea Pines Plantation** and was elected to the **Sea Pines Co.** board of directors in 1965. He left the company in 1974 but returned to the board as vice chairman in 1977.
- Became head of the **Heritage Classic Foundation**, the nonprofit group that now runs the tournament.
- Raised millions of dollars in 2006 for **Hilton Head Preparatory School's** 20,600-square-foot field house.

Please see FRASER on 9A

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# FRASER

Continued from 1A

For many years, he played the quiet foil to the outspoken Charles Fraser. The pair developed Sea Pines Plantation, a carefully planned, environmentally sensitive community on more than 5,000 acres at the island's south end.

Charles was the visionary and Joseph took a more hands-on approach, according to those who knew him.

He was a homebuilder and a corporate officer in charge of day-to-day operations at the family-owned Sea Pines Plantation Co. He also designed buildings and entire communities. The plans for Hilton Head Plantation were developed on his dining room table.

"It fell to Dad to plan, to design, to operate," his son Simon Fraser said. "He naturally gravitated toward the land-planning side."

Born on Jan. 27, 1926, in Hinesville, Ga., Joseph Fraser served in the U.S. Army during World War II and graduated from the University of Georgia with a

**"It fell to Dad to plan, to design, to operate. He naturally gravitated toward the land-planning side."**

Simon Fraser, son of Joseph B. Fraser Jr., on his father's developments on Hilton Head Island

marketing degree.

In 1964, Fraser left his father's lumber business in Hinesville to work with Charles Fraser on Hilton Head Island. He became senior vice president for Sea Pines Plantation and was elected to the Sea Pines Co. board of directors in 1965.

Charles Fraser founded the Sea Pines Co. in 1956 and pushed to connect Hilton Head to the mainland with a bridge built the same year.

The land-use concepts Charles Fraser applied in Sea Pines were ahead of their time, but the foresight to encode his idea for a "contractual community" in restrictive covenants was perhaps his most lasting contribution.

Like Charles, Joseph sought to balance the community's natural beauty with development.

He pushed to set back hous-

ing from the beach to preserve the dunes and articulated the community's tree standards, according to Thomas Norby, who grew up with Joseph Fraser in Hinesville and worked for him at Sea Pines.

"His philosophy was to maintain the elements that made the island what it is," Norby said.

An intelligent executive who led by example, he also was kind. He saved land from a development near Palmetto Bay for Norby to build his first house.

In the 1970s, when an employee's parents' house burned down in Walterboro, Fraser quickly shipped trucks of furniture to outfit the couple's new home, Norby said.

"He was a man of uncommon grace and humility," said David Ames, who worked with Fraser as a Sea Pines executive. "It

## REMEMBERING JOSEPH B. FRASER JR.

A memorial service will be at 3 p.m. Monday at St. Luke's Church on Hilton Head.

drew people to him."

Fraser left the company in 1974 but returned to the board as vice chairman in 1977. His involvement with the company included land planning, development and community services. He was also chairman of the company's architectural-review board and the company's liaison with property owners.

Along with Charles, he worked to start the Heritage Classic golf tournament. The event is now known as the RBC Heritage Presented by Boeing and is played each April at Harbour Town Golf Links in Sea Pines.

The Fraser brothers managed the PGA Tour tournament from its inception in 1969 until 1982. Joseph Fraser later became head of the Heritage Classic Foundation, the nonprofit group that

now runs the tournament.

In 2002, Joseph Fraser became the third recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, given by the PGA Tour Tournaments Association. He was selected because he spent more than three decades in volunteer service to the tournament and was committed to the event's many charitable endeavors, tournaments association executive director Suzanne Bhole said at the time.

Fraser's work with the Heritage Classic Foundation helped save the tournament from financial trouble in the 1980s.

"What he's done for this tournament ... we wouldn't be here talking today if he hadn't stuck his neck out," tournament director Steve Wilmot said.

In addition to his service to the first Hilton Head Homebuilders Association, Fraser was a member of the S.C. Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission, a member of St. Luke's Church and the namesake of Hilton Head Preparatory School's 20,600-square-foot field house, for which he raised millions of dollars in 2006. He

also was active in sailing and sport fishing.

At Charles Fraser's funeral in December 2002, Joseph Fraser spoke of their days growing up in a lumber family in Hinesville and the lessons their parents taught them about faith, family and stewardship.

"When I come here, I am overcome with emotion because there is no finer example of his development and his design approach than the Harbour Town Lighthouse and the Liberty Oak," he said.

Asked in 2006 about his contributions to the island — particularly in developing Sea Pines — Joseph Fraser was, as usual, a man of few words: "It was a good plan."

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Carolyn Bexley Fraser. He is survived by his wife, Jean O'Keeffe Fraser; sons Joseph B. Fraser III of Bluffton, Charles B. Fraser and J. Simon Fraser of Hilton Head, J. West Fraser of Charleston, and daughter Carolyn B. Fraser of Charleston.

Follow reporter Dan Burley at [twitter.com/IPBG\\_Dan](https://twitter.com/IPBG_Dan).

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"To the Fraser family: So sad to hear about Joe. I have..."

- Faisal Dahmoun

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