

Barn Brothers in Blake's 'eternal portfolio'

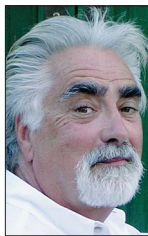
Friends and family recall Bob Blake's generosity

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Imagine a drop of water striking a pond – a momentary impression in what seems a solid surface, a glistening crown of droplets rising skyward and ripples radiating outward, silently touching everything in their path.

Such was the image Kevin Casner of Indian Land used to describe the life of his brother-in-law, the late Robert Earl "Bob" Blake.

Blake, 60, a longtime Indian Land resident and local entrepreneur, died June 8 after a brief battle with esophageal cancer, diagnosed in December. He would have



celebrated his 61st birthday tomorrow, July 11. Though Blake was well-known for his business acumen, he was also known by many for his quiet generosity that, among other things, helped establish the Barn Brothers men's fellowship in Indian Land.

Speaking during a party celebrating Blake's life June 15, Casner said he liked to think of Blake's life in terms of those ripples on water, his unheralded acts of generosity and quiet encouragement of others, radiating out from the act itself and affecting others in unseen ways.

"You never know the impact a man can have on the life of another," Casner said. "Bob believed Jesus offered him a good deal in life. He took it, and he'd want you to take it, too."

Born and raised in Charlotte, N.C., many said Blake was a natural at finding "good deals" and turning them into gold.

Family and friends said as a young man he spent \$300 on a real estate course, derided as a waste of time by some, and turned it into a personal fortune, much of it the result of his early recognition of Indian Land's potential for future growth.

In subsequent years, Blake invested in both properties and businesses in Indian Land. One of the most well known was the former Bob's Cars LLC near the corner of Charlotte Highway and Shelly Mullis Road.

Many who spoke of Blake used contrasting terms, such as describing him as a superior businessman who never acted superior.

"He was very frugal person, but he was a very generous person," Casner said. "He might come across as a little bit of a hard butt, but he was kind. He wouldn't let you take even a penny from him, but if you needed it, he'd give you \$100."

Tony McDermott of Rock Hill, who attended the for-



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ABOVE: Donne Bechtler of Edgemoor, checks out photos from the life of the late Bob Blake during a memorial party at Blake's farm in Lancaster. Blake, a former Indian Land resident, died June 8. **LEFT:** Adrienne Johnson of Indian Land, left, shares her memories of Blake with his widow, Marla Blake, right, as Blake's friend Hal Wood looks on. **BELOW:** Lori and Tony McDermott of Rock Hill, left, and Ed Sniadecki of Fort Mill reminisce about their friend Bob Blake.



Casner said Blake didn't attend the Barn Brothers' Tuesday night meetings much until early 2010 during a time of intense personal and business adversity, which Casner referred to as Blake's "Crucible of St. Adversity."

He said after receiving the support of the fellowship, Blake repaid it by becoming one of the Barn Brothers' most supportive members, financially and otherwise, a man who had a special talent for getting through to other men with his quiet wisdom.

"Most of the time with men, we think we're the only one who's going through hell," Casner said. "Bob showed them they weren't."

"All of this (the Barn Brothers) stemmed from the generosity of Bob's heart," he said. "Without it, none of this would have been possible."

About two years later, something else good happened to Blake – he met his soulmate, Marla Allen, whom he married almost immediately.

Over the course of the year they were married before his death, Marla Blake said her husband was intent on learning to put aside regret, focusing more on relationships and living life to the fullest.

She said it was during that time that he decided to work on developing his "eternal portfolio" by helping others – including arranging for ongoing support of the Barn Brothers.

Marla Blake said her husband became more emotionally healthy as a result of his spiritual health, which improved even as his physical health temporarily improved

and then waned over the course of his treatment.

She said they had come up with a bedtime ritual of asking each other at the end of the day if they had any regrets. "Absolutely none," Marla Blake said he'd say, and then they'd drift off to sleep.

"We were moving forward with what 'authentic love' is as it relates to relationships, because that's all you leave behind, love and relationships," Marla Blake said. "It's all about meeting people where they are and loving them for what they are."

"He's the one that concluded through some of our discussions that the 'eternal portfolio' was going to be the lasting impact ... the ripple effect is already taking place

and that will live on and impact multiple generations. That's what he wanted."

Blake's daughter Courtney said the party was a moving reminder of how much her father was loved. She said she was proud of him and learned from watching him learn.

"My dad finally got to be the kind of man he wanted to be, and all these people are here to say he loved, and he was loved by others," Courtney Blake said. "Family, friends and his faith were very important to him."

"He finally found out what was important and learned to let the rest go," she said. "And I think that's what I learned from my dad – to live every day knowing what's important."

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