



Pete McGinty

Bidding farewell to 'island pioneer'

McGinty, earliest creator of 'Hilton Head look,' dies

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Retired architect Richard A. "Pete" McGinty, the first to create the "Hilton Head look" after moving to an island with no bridge in 1954, died Friday in his Sea Pines home. He was 86.

"He is the father of architecture on Hilton Head Island," said architect Doug Corkern of Bluffton.

"You can go to a road today in Port Royal Plantation and stop and look around and see the houses up and down the road and know that you can only be in one place on earth and that's Hilton Head.

"You see nature left alone, and none of the houses are shouting greater than the others. Pete did that."

Before the bridge came in 1956 and before there was a demand for homes, McGinty — with his wife, Aileen, teaching in a one-room schoolhouse at Honey Horn — helped Fred C. Hack

and the Hilton Head Co. plan roads and the traffic circles.

He helped lay out the early roads in Sea Pines for Charles E. Fraser.

He helped design the 56-room William Hilton Inn in 1958 and the Lake House in Sea Pines, the pro shop at the community's first golf course. He designed the island's first stick-built library and the initial sanctuary of First Presbyterian Church, where he was a charter member.

McGinty made suggestions about what has become Coligny Plaza, urging that its first buildings not face the traffic circle but pull people into the property.

Along with architects including Corkern and the late John Wade and Ed Wiggins, McGinty created a Hilton

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Head style by using natural materials, muted stains rather than paint, wide overhangs, screen porches, wood shake shingles, multiple roof lines and expansive use of glass. The homes capitalized on vistas and blended with the reefs.

"It was born, as far as I am concerned, out of a conscious effort to build with a limited number of materials that would stand up to the climate," McGinty told Jim Littlejohn in 1980 interview.

"As to its uniqueness, there are some places where similar things were beginning to happen. The West Coast in the late '50s was beginning to do things with natural wood — redwood mostly. Here we had cypress available. It weathered well and had a finer grain than pine.

"That, plus the idea that there could be a wide range of design options while staying within a certain concept, is

what brought it about."

McGinty is cited in "Prof and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island" by Michael N. Danielson as a "true island pioneer whose homes helped create strong sense of place and increase land values.

McGinty was reared in the college town of Clemson, where his father was renowned horticulturist responsible for developing the Clemson spineless okra.

He served in the U.S. Navy in World War II, and earned degrees in mechanical engineering and architecture from Clemson University. He and Aileen reared three children on the island, where she taught for more than 30 years. She died in July 2013.

McGinty was a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects and served on its board. He was a leader in state and national architect examination boards.

He chaired the jury for the Golden Palmetto Award to recognize outstanding island architecture and design.

the love of Pete, save the 'Hilton Head look'

McGinty must have thought he was in a different world when he saw Hilton Head for the first time in 1953. Arriving with a two-year appointment with an architectural firm in Columbia when a small "Lots For Sale" ad in The (Columbia) State newspaper caught his attention. He was not familiar with the location: Hilton Head. The ad said, "Make arrangements to see the property by calling us."

His new wife, Aileen, said they needed to make it. But when they got to Hilton Head and there was no one to take them to the low-lying area in the distance, their trip to a new world began. He made arrangements next door, picked up by Wilton Jeppster. What they call it was such a narrow, they had to push back



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the limbs by hand before arriving at Forest Beach, where there were two homes.

They bought an oceanfront lot for \$1,100.

A year later, they could move down when Aileen got a job teaching in a one-room schoolhouse at Honey Horn. Pete got jobs with Fred C. Hack, who was running the Hilton Head Co.

He used his Clemson University undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering to help place roads, traffic circles, and new buildings.

He was the first architect in a place that became known for its look — homes of natural colors blending with the trees, with expan-



Submitted photo

Pete McGinty's design of the Lake House, the pro shop at Hilton Head Island's first golf course, helped set a distinctive tone for Sea Pines architecture.

sive glass and screen porches bringing the outside in and the inside out.

Oddly enough, long before Richard A. "Pete" McGinty died Friday at age 86, the growth he saw on

Hilton Head again made him feel he was in a foreign land.

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PETE

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KINDRED SPIRITS

Pete was a deep thinker who was known to take his time with the drawings that shaped the "Hilton Head look."

"I went to see Pete one day in his office and he was busy with a client," recalls landscape architect Ed Pinckney. "He said just to wait for him in his office. So while I was waiting, I noticed one whole wall was covered with notes and bits of paper, reminding Pete to do things or call people. When Pete was free, I said, 'Pete, do you realize about half of those people on your wall are dead?' Pete said, 'Oh, yeah ... well ... that's OK' and we went on with our business."

He found time to bring a distinctive look to the island's first large hotel (56 rooms), the

first sanctuary for First Presbyterian Church, and a pro shop for the first golf course in Sea Pines.

Pete found kindred spirits on Hilton Head. But as early as 1980, as the island stood on the cusp of a growth explosion, he said we needed to cap growth "to a point we can accommodate." We should never widen another highway, or install another traffic light, he said. We should look into a monorail, he said.

He opposed the island's incorporation, which voters approved in 1983. He feared land-use ordinances would demand larger parking lots and reduce flexibility for designers.

When he and partners got into development, he also faced opposition from old-timers saying enough was enough.

Despite all the change on the

island — and at home, where he cared for Aileen for years prior to her death last year — Pete never quit thinking he could help shape a better community.

'UP, UP, UP'

Pete thought the island should return to its roots as it looks to the future.

"The architectural style is just not indigenous in any way," he told me a few years ago in our last long conversation. "It could be Mediterranean style or old Charleston, something that's selling in other places, sort of picked up and plunked down here."

"It's Anywhere, U.S.A. That's the tragedy of it."

At the time, he'd been wracking his brain to figure out a way to preserve buildings of half a century ago on Hilton Head, just as Beaufort and Savannah have jealously

guarded their buildings and sense of proportion.

But instead he saw people paying massive sums for lots, so they tore down the old and maximized every inch of space with larger buildings.

"Everything has gone up, up, up," Pete said.

"We used to make buildings fit into the landscape and be as unobtrusive as possible."

It's a "Hilton Head look" that worked very well.

Pete saw that slipping into something bigger, more grandiose.

"Oh, it's terrible," he said. "It's terrible."

Times change. People change.

But for the love of Pete, Hilton Head Island should try harder to remain a different world.

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