



Benjamin Franklin Jones III

July 13, 1918 - November 3, 2019

Benjamin Franklin Jones III, 101, of Gladwyne and Waverly Heights, an innovative and world-class engineer and respected veteran company executive for four decades at BF Goodrich, passed away Sunday, November 3, 2019 at Lankenau Hospital.

His Memorial Service will be held on December 7th at 1 pm at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church and a celebration of his life will be held immediately following the church service at the spacious Waverly Heights auditorium from 3-5 pm.

Ben moved to Waverly Heights in 2009 after the death of his beloved wife Frances. He was well-known at Waverly Heights for his love of fitness, playing bridge, friends, the Phillies, University of Michigan (he was a Michigan cheerleader in the Gerald Ford era), and the Villanova Wildcats basketball team. His son, Bob took him to two Villanova basketball practices where Coach Jay Wright met him for the first time in 2017. Ben said upon meeting Coach Wright, "Coach, are you going to win National Championships for us in even-numbered years?" (Villanova had already won in 2016 by that time). Coach Wright looked at Ben in his wheelchair, and smiled broadly and said, "Ben, that's a great idea!" and then gave Ben his Villanova team wrist bracelet which Ben wore for the entire year, and until his passing. (The Wildcats went on that year to win the National title that year against Ben's

beloved Michigan). The next year at the same venue in the new Finneran Center, Coach Wright called Ben “his oldest fan” in front of a group of boosters and gave him his “Attitude” bracelet. Ironically, and previously, that year, his son had met then-coach of Michigan basketball, John Bielein, in the Philadelphia airport and Coach Bielein enthusiastically did a video shout-out to Ben on Bob’s cell phone to thank him for his lifetime support of Michigan athletics and to wish him a happy birthday.

Ben began his career after graduating from the University of Michigan as a mechanical engineer and draftsman at BFGoodrich headquarters in Akron, Ohio. (At Michigan, Jones was an active member and football team quarterback of the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity and an avid tennis, squash, and bridge player.)

He worked for BFGoodrich for 40 years. He was fortunate to work in BFGoodrich’s patent department for two years; he still holds 14 patents in jet aircraft wheels and brakes, having helped to develop those components immediately after World War II. He attended law school at night for a year and a half at the nearby University of Akron. Within one year, he won a competitive position in the patent department and would have stayed there if he had not subsequently been recruited to BFGoodrich’s Airplane Equipment Department. He became the assistant manager of the department, which was headed at the time by Wilson Harvey Hunter (who eventually became head of NASA for Western Australia).

Later, he served as vice president of BFGoodrich Aerospace Marketing and moved to Troy, Ohio (near Dayton), where he oversaw the wheels and brakes plant. At that time, the Troy plant employed roughly 2,000 people and was considered a leader in the industry for airplane brake systems. After six successful years in Troy, he was called back to BFGoodrich’s world headquarters in Akron, where he became vice president of Aerospace

Development.

In Akron, his team developed the world's first space suit. (An engineer who worked for him broke his wife's sewing machine with a rubber suit and that was the genesis of the first space suit). With the invention of the space suit, BFGoodrich won the Mercury and Apollo contracts, and he met all of the astronauts, including John Glenn, who with his brother-in-law, Glenn C. Whipkey, formed Muskingum's football backfield before the war. He also got to meet notable aviation luminaries like Werner Von Braun, Eddie Rickenbacker, Charles Lindbergh, and Jimmy Doolittle.

Eventually in the early '70s, he became vice president of the BFGoodrich Tire Division. Aerospace was one of the main profitable divisions at that time, so they combined it with Tires to attempt to reenergize and bootstrap the passenger tire business. In that role, he eventually got to work on five-year plans for the entire company for then-president John Ong.

Ben served many philanthropic organizations with enthusiasm and wisdom, including President of Junior Achievement for Akron, Ohio, President of the Firestone High School Aquatic Association, Rotary, Zoning Board for Pinehurst, North Carolina, Professional Golfers Association (PGA) Hall of Fame volunteer, the Pinehurst Chapel, and the Tin Whistles of Pinehurst. He was also the head of the Aerospace Committee for the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE—who recognized him with a lifetime achievement plaque for his 100th birthday) during the 1950's when his father, B. Franklin Jones II, was the head of the Truck Committee, which was an unusual honor for both father and son. His father was an engineer for Pierce-Arrow and he served the military in the early 1930's through the end of World War II as White Motor's 'Manager of Federal Programs.' For example, he was instrumental in inventing the front roller for the White Motor A-10 Halftrack (used often and effectively to transport our troops in World War II). After his work, the design of

the front bumper ensured that when the Halftrack drove into a ditch, it would not stick there (as it did before his design change), but would stay moving and come up on the other side intact.

Ben tried twice to enlist in the US Navy during WWII but BF Goodrich would not let him. They asked him to spearhead the research on our airplane de-icers to be used by American bomber planes over Germany during the war. He traveled to Mount Washington, New Hampshire and Minneapolis, two of the coldest places in the US to test these devices during the war.

In his own words for SAE, he wrote the following about that experience: For icing research, we used the Cold Regions Laboratory on top of Mount Washington in New Hampshire – one of the coldest places in the country at 50 degrees below zero or lower at night. The first time we ascended the mountain in a Sno-Cat, we only made it three of the eight miles before a blizzard stopped our vehicle in the rough terrain.

We continued on foot. Only two of my colleagues and I made it to the station at the top of the mountain – five others in our party had to turn back. When we opened the door at the station, the men inside were playing pool and ping-pong and had just finished a steak dinner! We then turned around and went back down the mountain by nightfall.

Another site where we tested de-icers was in Minneapolis, where we flew around in a two-engine bomber looking for snow clouds to penetrate. I had to sit in the cramped nose gunner seat to watch the wings – and the de-icers – as they started to ice up. That was an interesting experience and fairly cold at times, but nothing compared to what our brave aviators had to endure on their long and dangerous bombing runs over Germany.

There are four main achievements that he was especially proud of that his team worked on: multidisc airplane brakes, for which he holds 14 patents with BFGoodrich; pneumatic and electronic de-icer systems, which he worked on almost exclusively during WWII; jet aircraft escape systems, the prototype of

which his team sold to Boeing who manufactured them (they are the slides that commercial planes use now during emergency landings); and puncture-proof pneumatic tires and bulletproof fuel tanks (during WWII) made of reconstituted rubber.

Ben met the love of his life, Frances Goode Jones, at a high school blind date at Cleveland Heights High School with her twin sister (Barbara). He was happily married to Frances for 67 years and when Barbara's husband, a decorated WWII aviator, passed away, Barbara came to live near Ben and Frances for more than 30 years. The three of them went everywhere together and were indeed virtually inseparable.

Ben was also an accomplished golfer all of his life and was a 2-handicap golfer when his first son, Bob, was born. Ben's youngest son Bill, was a golf writer, radio talk show host, supporter of charitable causes in Pinehurst, North Carolina and friend of such notables as North Carolina basketball legend Dean Smith and North Carolina State icon Coach Jimmy Valvano. Bill predeceased his father in 1995 and a Foundation was established in his name that permanently endowed two college scholarships in Journalism at a local college and established an annual golf camp for nearby High School students who have not yet had an opportunity to learn to play the game of golf.

Beside his son Robert and Bob's wife Debbie, whom he adored, Ben is survived by two beloved grandchildren, Kristen Elizabeth Jones and Robert Benson Jones, Jr., who are both physicians.

Bob and his family have been truly blessed to have him so close, so safe and well-cared for at Waverly Heights, and surrounded by so many dear friends.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests any contributions may be made to the Waverly Heights' Ltd. Foundation, Attention: Margaret Faha, or to the Bryn Mawr Hospital Foundation, Attention: Brittany McCrimmon.

Previous Events

Memorial Service

DEC 7. 1:00 PM (ET)

Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
625 Montgomery Avenue
Bryn Mawr, PA