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John Thomas Watkins

March 13, 1920 - Jan. 2, 2012

John Thomas Watkins, Jr. died at Grace Ridge Retirement Community in Morganton, North Carolina, on January 2, 2012. John was born on March 13, 1920, in Richmond, Virginia, son of John Thomas Watkins and Eva W. (Brewer) Watkins.He attended public schools in Richmond and graduated from the University of Richmond in 1940. While in college, he was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity. He rowed for the Richmond Crew and the Virginia Boat Club.John joined the Army Air Corps in November, 1940, and graduated from advanced flying school in July, 1941. On December 8, 1941, he left Langley Field, Virginia, with the 22nd Bomb Group for Australia. John was in action until July, 1944, when he was transferred home. He was separated from the service as a Major in 1946.John married Betty Lee Edwards in 1947, in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. They were married for nearly sixty years when Lee passed away in 2007.John spent his career in business working for Travelers Insurance Company, Monsanto Chemical Company, Fabricon Products, and Watkins Machine Sales, which he founded. Job changes sent John and Lee to Richmond, Virginia, Suffield, Connecticut, Detroit, Michigan, Arcadia, California, and Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham, Michigan. In 1981, the couple retired to Morganton, North Carolina.While in Morganton, John was involved in many civic activities. He was Director of Economic Development, and president of the Friends of the Library, the Morganton Kiwanis Club, and the Western Piedmont College Foundation. He was active in the Burke County Chamber of Commerce, participated in fund-raising for the Phifer Learning Center, and co-chaired the Burke County United Way.Additionally, he assisted in the restoration of the Quaker Meadows House, helped construct homes with Habitat for Humanity, repaired bicycles for Christmas Cheer, and tutored for the

Literacy Council. John was honored as the Morganton Rotary Club’s "Man of the Year" in 1996.John was a participant in the development of the Burke Mission Station where he served on the Board of Directors. He worked in the soup kitchen and was building manager.John enjoyed woodworking, reproducing 18th and 19th century pieces. John and Lee collected antique furniture and pewter. They were members of

the Pewter Collectors Club of America. John’s other interests included flying, model railroading, and antique and classic automobiles.Surviving are a sister, Anne Watkins, of Richmond, Virginia; daughters Dell Coyne and her husband, Michael, of Nashua, New Hampshire, Donna Bacon and husband, Judd, of Hendersonville, North Carolina; and son, Tom Watkins and his partner, Debra Tootla, of San Antonio, Texas. He leaves five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Surviving also is a sister-in-law, Susi Edwards, of El Paso, Texas, and two nephews.There will be no funeral services. Memorials may be made to the Scholarship Fund at Grace Ridge Retirement Community, 500 Lenoir Road, Morganton, NC 28655.Sossoman Funeral Home is handling the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.