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Mackie now playing heaven's harmonica

By Viviann Kuehl Contributor

Jefferson County's music man, who brought joy in music to so many children, and inspired adults with his dedication, will be missed.

Andy Mackie died Saturday, Nov. 5, 2011 in Jackson, Mich., where he was receiving care for a stroke and his chronic heart failure. He was 72.

Mackie devoted the last 10 years of his life to bringing music to children, particularly the children of Jefferson County. It was all borrowed time, and well spent, according to Mackie, and the many children who benefited from his generosity. His passing brings many tributes from many who knew him as the music man of Jefferson County.

Mackie's health problems led to his extraordinary generosity of heart.

A slight, soft-spoken and shy man, Mackie delighted in helping others. In his softened Scottish accent, a remnant of his childhood in Scotland, he would tell anyone who was willing to listen about his project.

More than a decade ago, Mackie, retired from a career working with livestock, came to Quilcene to stay with daughter Laurie Wolford and his grandchildren. He was having frequent hospitalizations for heart problems, and was on a number of medications.

Mackie found that working took his mind off his pain. He created a reindeer yard statue out of alder logs



Andy Mackie took time to teach music to students throughout Jefferson County. Photo by Viviann Kuehl

and branches as a gift, and soon found himself cranking out the cute reindeers as a business. He used the proceeds to support several drug-free programs for youths in the local area. He enjoyed giving away about half of his annual production of around 500, usually playing "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" on his harmonica as he presented his gifts.

AN EPIPHANY

Then one day, Mackie had an epiphany. Struggling with the side effects of all the medications he was taking, he decided that he would just stop taking so many drugs. They were expensive, at around \$600 a month, and they didn't seem to provide a better life. Recognizing the risk he was taking, he thought about what he wanted to do with whatever time he might have left.

Mackie decided to devote himself to delivering music to children, and with that, his life changed, and so did the lives of many children.

Mackie wanted to pass on the gift of music, which he got from his mother as a small boy when she gave him a harmonica. Mackie believed that music should be a resource for all children — and from an early age.

He often noted that music provides joy and solace, and it teaches discipline and dedication, qualities sought by employers. Mackie also wanted those he taught to pass the gift on to others.

He started with a single visit to a local classroom, teaching tunes with harmonicas he provided. It went well, and before long he was called back to other classes. His work snowballed; he

gladly took on the expanding challenge.

Mackie distributed an estimated 18,000 harmonicas to children, along with lessons in how to play them. He started with Quilcene School, but soon set a goal to get a harmonica to every child in the county schools. His goals grew larger as he worked, moving from providing harmonicas to every child in Quilcene School, then to every school in the county, then to the North Olympic Peninsula.

He began to think about making other instruments so children could learn more. He built some dulcimers, then added his own versions of compact stringed instruments to his gifting, and began to teach children and adults how to make them. He produced just under 4,000 instruments since 2001, distributed to children in 24 countries.

He had programs in every school in the county, and enlisted people to help with concerts. He developed scholarship programs.

One summer Mackie spent visiting every park in the county, handing out harmonicas and teaching songs. He asked recipients to teach someone else, and some reported their successes back to him.

He no longer had time to mass produce his reindeer, and in 1996 he started the Andy Mackie Music Foundation, a non-profit whose mission was to spread music. He would help finance his work by selling instruments on its website.

On May 25, 2005, Mackie led the world's largest harmonica band, a crowd of about 3,000 people playing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little

Star" for 13 minutes and 40 seconds. He always told classes that someday he would have the largest harmonica band in the world, and when he connected with Folk Life Festival in Seattle he made it a reality. Using kits, Mackie made and handed out almost 2,500 harmonicas, and had 1,706 people fill out the official forms in order to secure a Guinness World Record.

Despite his natural shyness, he was tireless in promoting his music, and was featured in many articles, on radio, and even on national television. He developed a website for his foundation, and attracted donors to support his programs.

HEART OF SERVICE

In 2006, he received a Jefferson County Heart of Service Award for his work.

Mackie often said that the music and the children kept him going all these years beyond what he expected.

In September 2010, Mackie reluctantly left his home in Jefferson County to stay with his daughter Laurie Wolford, now in Michigan, but he insisted that his work would continue and he would visit several times a year to make sure it did. His last visit was in May 2011.

Survivors include a twin brother, Eddie Mackie; four children, Wolford, Julie Rector, Scott Mackie and Mark Mackie; six grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

According to his wishes, a celebration of his life — with lots of music — is being planned for a later date. His cremated remains will be brought back to Jefferson County.