

noteworthy 

# Billy Raines

by Jackie Perrone



New York may have its Macy's Parade, but in Blythewood, it's Billy Raines and his mule Jessie who lead off the holiday season. What began as a fling to have fun in 1995 has evolved into a full-fledged parade complete with bands, trucks, tractors and the bearded Billy in his "Sandy Claws" suit, kicking off the Christmas season in Blythewood.

"My wife Carolyn was the one who really got this going," claims Billy Raines. "I lost her last year. She had Lupus and was sick for a long time. People were so good to us—doing so many neighborly things—that Carolyn wanted to do something for the community. She thought riding down the street in a wagon pulled by a mule would make people smile, and it did."

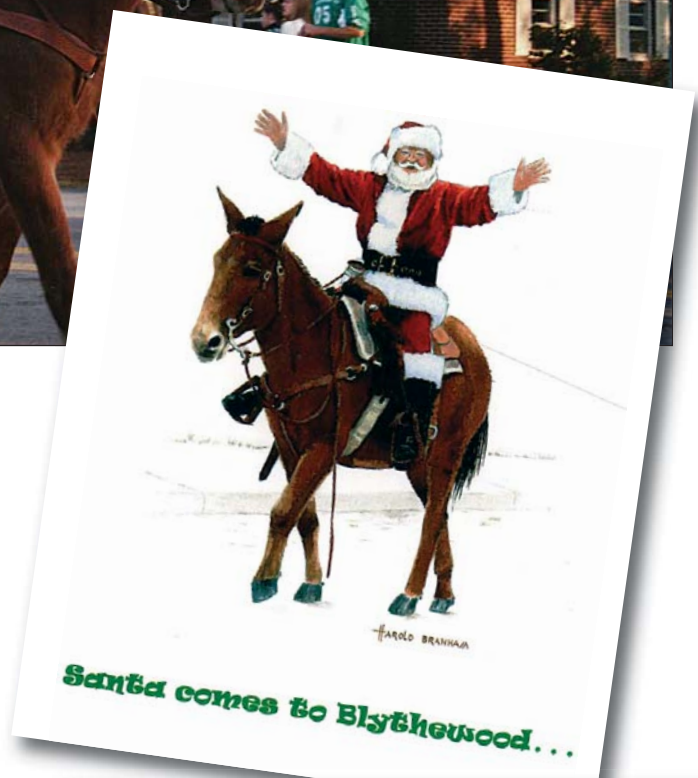
"That first year, we had 15 people who rode from the Fire Department to the new post office, about a 10-minute ride. When Thomas Rimer at Blythewood Feed and Seed saw us, he came over with a bucket of candy, which we gave out to everyone who came along. We must have been at it for five or six hours."

From that spontaneous beginning, the Blythewood Christmas Parade has grown into a community treasure. Everybody who wants to dress up and take part joins in. Now the streets are blocked off, the politicians show up, trucks and tractors come along with antique cars. Olin Jackson of the South Carolina Donkey and Mule Association has brought his wagon. Sometimes there are 37 mules parading.

One year the parade had the Honor Guard from The Citadel. The fire truck is there, and what the locals call "cowboy pickups"—all dolled up for the ride. Harold Branham, a well-known local artist, has created paintings and commemorative cards for the celebration.

Billy misses his wife Carolyn, asserting that she started the whole thing to let people know how much she appreciated their kindness. Her disease, Lupus, is also known as "The Butterfly Disease," because it sometimes leaves a butterfly-shaped discoloration on the face. Carolyn Raines loved butterflies, collected them in stained glass and wood and ceramics, and visited butterfly gardens in other states.

Billy Raines spent 30 years in the employ of Bowater Corporation, and now works with the Maintenance Department of the Town of Blythewood. But his best moments are spent as Sandy Claws (*his preferred spelling*) in the Blythewood Christmas Parade. ■



Billy Raines and his late wife, Carolyn, bringing holiday cheer to Blythewood.

