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AGELESS HERO

Thomas Shelton Boggess Jr., at his Macon farm.

BOGESS PHOTO BY SCOTT BOYD

T.S. Boggess Jr. honored with state 'vitality' award

BY SCOTT BOYD
Staff Writer

VITALITY...*The peculiarity distinguishing the living from the nonliving...capacity to live and develop...physical or mental vigor-especially when highly developed...power of enduring...*

Webster's Dictionary editors probably don't know T.S. Boggess Jr., but they'd probably be pleased to know there's someone out there that fits their definition of "vitality."

But, don't ask Boggess to explain why he's been singled out as Mississippi's "Vitality" example. "I'm not much on awards," the spry, but humble 92-year-old says.

Boggess joined a distinguished group of Mississippians this week - Ageless Heroes - honored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield Insurance of Mississippi.

Boggess is this year's Vitality award winner, one of six statewide winners recognized annually by Blue Cross for their long, productive lives.

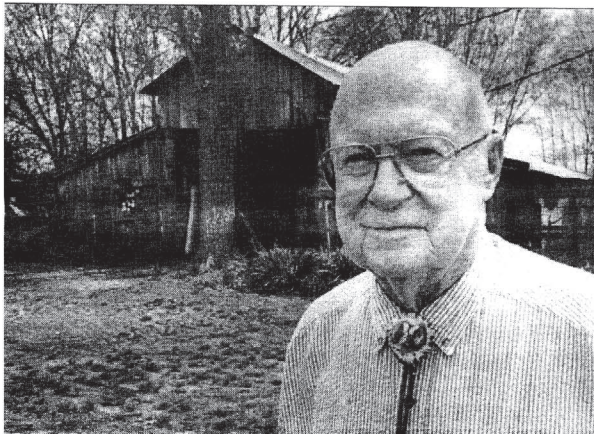
When Boggess had trouble walking his usual two miles a while back, he decided to take up swimming and water aerobics. The extra work helped. He now walks his two miles with ease almost every day.

He also stays busy with various hobbies around his Magnolia Drive farm, including raising grapes for his wine-making, and caring for his fruit and pecan orchard.

But, vitality isn't his only endearing quality. His vehicle is often called the "widow wagon," a fond reference assigned by his friends because he often drives his lady friends to various functions around town.

Boggess remains involved in the Rotary Club and is a longtime supporter of Boy Scouts. Among his crowning achievements, he says, is the help he gave to six area young men who earned the rank of Eagle Scout, scouting's highest honor.

Boggess says it's important to stay active. "Instead of joining my friends for coffee every morning, I prefer to mow the yard, play golf, or take a water aerobics class, even if I don't feel like it," he says.



What advice would he give? "Quit thinking about age and make a golf date," he says. "And, have young friends."

Among his "younger" friends are Jay and Lori Chancellor of Brooksville. They've been inspired for years by their friend's vitality and were responsible for nominating him for the Blue Cross award. "He's like a father to us," said Lori Chancellor.

The Chancellor's two sons, Will and Trey, both earned their Eagle Scout award with help from Boggess who is believed to be Mississippi's oldest living Eagle Scout. He's helped others too, including Justin Huerkamp, Rick and Matt McCann, and Drew Blackwell.

A Noxubee County native, Boggess and his late wife, Alice, moved back to Macon in 1974 after he retired from a long, distinguished career as a biochemist - mostly spent as a researcher with the University of Georgia's food science experiment station. He had also worked for a number of years with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in establishing a laboratory in Georgia. There was a period between 1947 and 1958 when he returned to Macon to work the family farm and teach at what was then East Mississippi Jr. College.

Boggess returned to Georgia in 1958 and stayed until his retirement. "We worked a lot on developing methods for freezing food," said Boggess, a LSU graduate. "We worked hard to try to help farmers solve problems with their food crops and worked to develop army rations."

He retired as an Associate Professor Emeritus in Food Service.

Back in Macon he and Mrs. Alice settled on the farm his great-grandfather bought in 1843. He became a widower when Mrs. Alice died on Thanksgiving Day of 1994.

"He and Mrs. Alice were the best example of a committed couple," says Lori Chancellor. "They were both always very kind and loving to each other."

Today, along with caring for his friends, his farm, and his golf game, Boggess often travels to spend time with his son's family in Arizona, and his daughter's family in Texas.

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Blue Cross's Ageless Heroes program was created in 1997 to celebrate the spirit and vitality of the nation's seniors and to showcase the organization's longtime commitment to healthy aging. Richard J. Hale, the president and chief executive officer of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Mississippi, saw the value of a similar program here.

"Ageless Heroes are people whose accomplishments at age 65 or older are inspirational to others," Hale said. "Society's spotlight tends to focus on younger people and Mississippi's Ageless Heroes program is a way to help change that by promoting the reality of active, healthy lifestyles for older adults. By showing hometown Mississippians as role models, we want to help others see what is possible in their own lives."

Boggess is the first Noxubee Countian to receive the award.

Other award winners honored along with Boggess at a ceremony in Hattiesburg Tuesday were: Community Involvement winner Hortense "Tonsie" Gaudé, 100, of Biloxi; New Beginnings winner George P. Hewes III, 75, of Jackson; Love of Learning winner Mary Beth Evans, 86, of Hattiesburg; Creativity winner Johnnie Billington, 68, of Lambert; and Good Neighbor winner Clara Johnson, 106, of Yazoo City.