



Jacob "Jake" Hardee

Jacob "Jake" Hardee is being honored as a 2013 Town Treasure for his leadership of community efforts related to volunteer fire-fighting and emergency medical assistance.

A third-generation Carrboro resident, Jake Hardee was born in a house that stood in what is now Wendy's parking lot. His grandfather, who had moved to Carrboro from South Carolina in 1919, operated the store where Cliff's Meat Market now stands. From that ringside seat to commerce and daily life in his hometown, Hardee enjoyed paying work as an insurance salesman, a deputy sheriff and a hospital supervisor. But the work nearest and dearest to his heart is the more than two decades he spent as a volunteer firefighter, and specifically his leadership in calling the organizational meeting of what was to become the South Orange Rescue Squad. As the last volunteer fire chief for Carrboro, Hardee realized the department had the right equipment to respond to medical emergencies in the community, but not the trained personnel to do so. After identifying the need and interest in such public service, Hardee worked with Tom Griggs, MD, a recent UNC School of Medicine graduate to set up a training program for community volunteers and medical students who were interested in emergency medicine. He approached local civic clubs about the need for a designated rescue vehicle, and the Lion's Club donated the squad's first ambulance—a repurposed hearse—in the early 1970s. Soon thereafter, when the squad needed space for their own building, Hardee wasn't shy about knocking on the door of the then local city executive for NCNB (the predecessor to today's Bank of America) and making the case. The resources were made available, and the station's home on Roberson Street in Carrboro is the result. Today, the South Orange Rescue Squad remains an all-volunteer squad, true to its founding principles of providing a strong student and community volunteer service focused on promoting education about and participation in rescue and emergency services. A tax-exempt organization, the South Orange Rescue Squad provides life-saving and life-changing service to Orange County residents, the UNC campus and the UNC Healthcare system.

- Without hesitation when asked about his most gratifying work, Hardee eagerly tells the story of the rescue squad's beginnings, weaving a history but not taking enough of the credit. "We were going on donations," he said. "People we approached could see the need. Everyone came together, and it worked out. I'm right proud of that."
- Hardee has seen a lot of change in his hometown. "I remember when the Town of Carrboro had only one vehicle and three employees—a town manager, a maintenance man and a chief of police. Now, I don't know how many vehicles the town owns, but it seems like there are four people riding in every one."
- With the exception of two years' service in the U.S. Army, Hardee has lived in his hometown all his life. Favorite pastimes were swimming in Mrs. Sparrow's Pool and in Hogan's Lake, the only places for recreation. And in the Charlie "Choo-Choo" Justice era at UNC, everybody went to the football games.
- As for the future, Hardee is concerned about the growth of the little mill village where everybody knew everybody. "I was happy with it the way it was, but I knew it couldn't and wouldn't stay that way. Now, every time you turn around, it costs a lot more to live here."