

FAREWELL | *Allen Vaughn's lifelong obsession with drums ended prematurely from cancer.*

He marched to the beat

By **MIKE BOLTON**
News staff writer

The soothing melodies of the Birmingham Society of Piping, a bagpipe band in which Allen Vaughn played the Scottish Highland Snare, will be enjoyed by many for years to come.

Band members insist, however, it will never be the same without the man who was responsible for making it happen.

Vaughn's lifelong obsession with drums ended prematurely recently when he died from cancer at age 50. Those who knew the Birmingham man and played in bands with him say his love for the percussion instruments will resonate across the South for years to come.

"I came to Birmingham 12 years ago, and Allen found out that I was a piper," said Jamie Hamilton. "He had played in pipe bands across the South, and he thought Birmingham needed something like that.

"He encouraged me to start something like that here. He was the visionary that made it happen."

Rarely was there a time in his life when Vaughn was far from a drum. He played in several rock and roll bands as a youngster. He played the drums in his high school marching band and moved on to play the drums in the Samford Marching Band.

Becky Vaughn, Allen's wife, knew from the start what she was getting into.

"We were college sweethearts at Samford," she said. "When we were engaged, he saw an ad in the paper that a piping group was looking for someone to play the drums. He joined."



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Throughout their 26 years of marriage, the couple traveled the country almost every weekend from April to November, with Allen playing in competitions and promotions.

"He played in the Atlanta Pipe Band, the Nashville Pipe and Drum and New Orleans Pipe and Drum," she said. "He was thrilled when Birmingham finally got a group.

"I never learned to play. I was just a groupie. It was a lot of fun."

Richard Neely played the trombone with Vaughn in the Samford University Marching Band and they became fast friends. He eventually moved to Pennsylvania, but came back to Birmingham in 1988. He said he was one of Vaughn's biggest fans.

"When I came back to Birmingham, we renewed our friendship, and it was like I had never left," he said. "He was such a fascinating person and knew a lot about a great many things.

"We were both into model trains, and he really had a passion for that. He even knew everything about plants and weeds. There wasn't a plant or weed he couldn't identify.

"He was the kindest person I ever met. I knew him all those years and never once did I hear him say anything negative about anyone. He really had a sense of humor, too. He was so deadpanned. You always wondered when he said something funny was he really trying to be that funny."

Hamilton said those who didn't know Vaughn well didn't get to see him at his best.

"He was very quiet and he kept to himself," Hamilton said, "but he gave of himself like few people you will ever see. He spent so much time helping drumming students.

"He spared no effort in his quest of learning. He learned to play the bagpipes so he could be a better drummer. He thought knowing how to play the bagpipes would make him a better band member and help to understand the music better.

"He was very forthright and honest. He'd tell you what he thought. I will miss his frankness."

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