

He led the way

Letter to the editor, [State Port Pilot](#), 07.19.23

On June 29, Homer Wright — best known in these parts as the developer of St. James Plantation — was named a recipient of The Order of the Long Leaf Pine. Awarded by the governor, it's one of the highest honors the state of North Carolina can bestow on its citizens.

Born in Eden, North Carolina, Homer's life experience was cut out for developing what many of us consider the ideal place to live. While he spends most of his time in St. James Plantation, Homer's primary residence remains Eden.

After serving in Italy during World War II, Homer returned to Eden, married and raised a family, and embarked on a remarkable entrepreneurial career in his hometown. Homer's professional pursuits soon focused on real estate investment, buying property at the ideal time to take advantage of the post-war boom and the growing need for affordable workforce housing.

When my colleague Cheryl Serra and I were researching our 2022 book, *"A Sizable Number of Miracles: The History of St. James Plantation,"* what impressed us most about Homer was his honesty and integrity. During our research, we gathered story after story and quote after quote from early residents who shared Homer's vision. John Muuss, who purchased his first property in 1995 when there were only 100 homes in St. James, had a good reason for investing his money: "I believed this man."

Homer was driven by altruistic motives as well as profit. One of his best-known projects was helping African Americans in Eden achieve their dream of home ownership. Using creative financing and offering the option of sweat equity for prospective homeowners, Homer developed Ellerbe Heights, which remains largely occupied by African-American owners some 50 years later.

Today, the need for affordable workforce housing is one of Brunswick County's most significant challenges. Workers in our manufacturing, construction, healthcare, education and service sectors often struggle to find housing, and many jobs go unfilled as a result. In a world driven by near-term profits, will we find a visionary willing to tackle this crisis?

Homer Wright led the way years ago. Who will follow?

Arthur Hill
St. James