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Up Close: Back to School

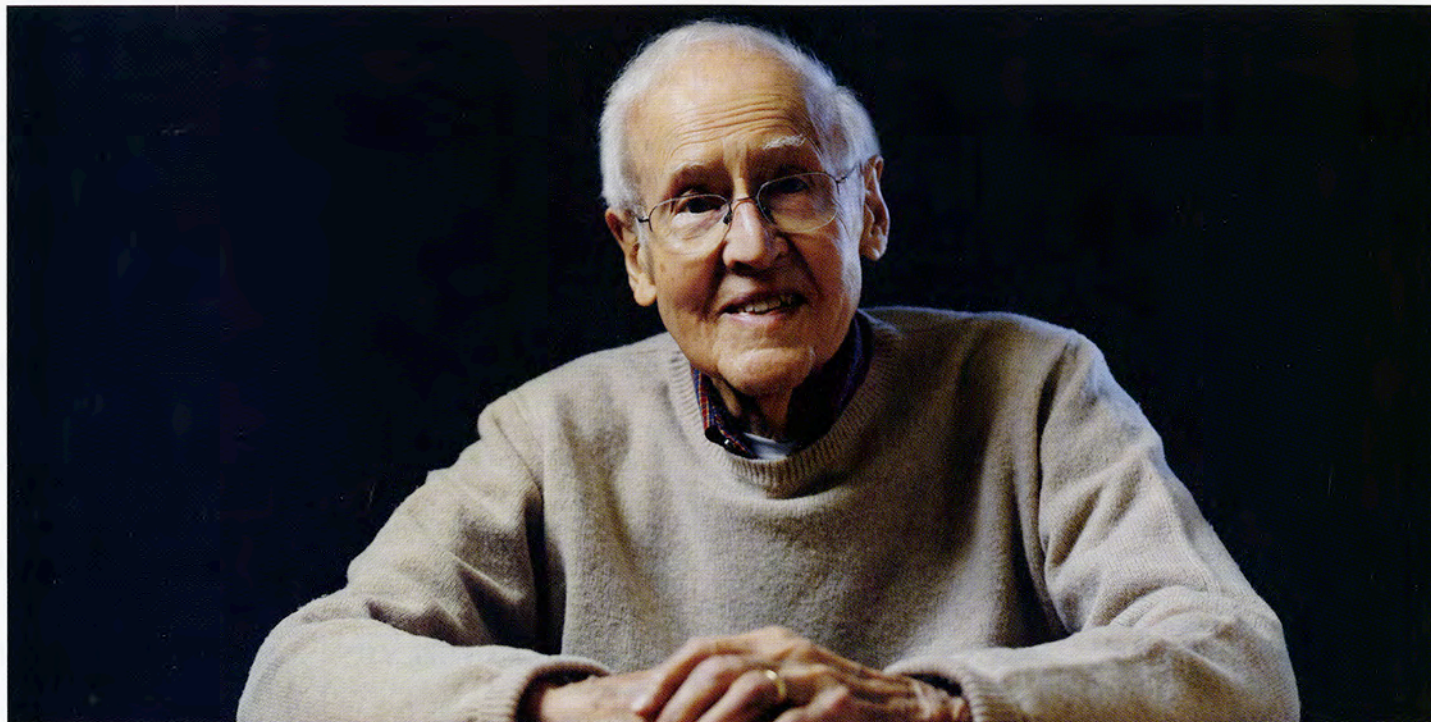
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UP CLOSE

Back to School

Sixty years of teaching leads John Crabtree to a new role – student.

On special days, he takes dance classes – hip-hop, jazz, ballroom, even Bollywood.

In 1957 John Crabtree arrived at Furman – still at its downtown location – to teach English. Six decades later, at age 92, he can still be found in the classroom, this time in the role of student.

“I enjoy being a student, especially a student in a class taught by a gifted teacher,” Crabtree says. “And Dr. (Judith) Bainbridge is a gifted teacher.” After decades of pacing at the front of classrooms, he became one of 140 students in a course on mill towns, which meets at the Herring Center in the

Crabtree Classroom, named in his honor.

Crabtree served as chair of the English department, academic dean and vice president for academic affairs, and taught many classes at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Founded in 1993, OLLI was designed to help senior adults stay intellectually and physically active. From its founding through fall 2014, he taught Shakespeare as well as American dramatists.

Gladys Spiak, who graduated from Furman in 1966, enjoyed Crabtree’s classes as an undergraduate and then again at OLLI, where she took five of his Shakespeare

courses. “When I retired and joined OLLI, I was pleased to see that he was still going strong and loving to teach,” she says.

Crabtree moved into the Woodlands at Furman three years ago with his wife, Anne, who passed away in May 2017. A longtime advocate for lifelong learning, he then decided to become a student again.

Of the 106 OLLI classes offered that fall, he chose Bainbridge’s course on mill villages. “I’ve always been interested in the mill economy of the South, and particularly South Carolina, and the kinds of lives these people lived in these company-owned villages,” he says.

Bainbridge, a retired English professor who has written 13 mill histories, covering 1819 through the 1990s, and Crabtree enjoyed learning about a time when he heard stories and controversies about local mills but didn’t know the details. “I was finishing my Ph.D. and teaching classes and had four children, so I had too much to do,” he says with a laugh.

Bainbridge was a professor when Crabtree was department chair and dean. She says she always admired his teaching talent, “so it is really flattering that he enrolled in the class.”

– Leigh Savage