

Jay Bretz – In Memoriam

by Danny Bernstein



Jay leading a CMC hike to Bearwallow

Jay Bretz, a long-time CMC member, passed away at the end of August 2017. He joined CMC in 1995.

Jay, a native of Dearborn, Michigan, was first a dentist, then became a physical therapist. He worked for the Hot Springs Health Program, helping seniors in their home regain their mobility and independence.

Jay was a hike leader and a regular on the trails, going out mostly on Wednesdays. He was a good, prepared leader, with a dry sense of humor which put everyone at ease.

In 2007, Jay became part of the five Amigos who walked the Camino Frances to Santiago, Spain, from St. Jean Pied-de-Port, France. This group was the first from Western North Carolina to undertake the 500-mile trek and report back. In subsequent years, with different pilgrims, Jay hiked from LePuy, France to St. Jean Pied-de-Port, Geneva to LePuy, the Jakobsweg across Switzerland, the Camino Portuguès, and the Italian pilgrimage Via Francigena.



The Amigos. Jay is on the far right with close friends (l. to r.) Don Walton, Tom Sanders, Chris Slater, and Carroll Koeplinger.

Hikers in the WNC chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino say that “Those who had the privilege of walking with Jay will always remember his commitment and pleasure with the Camino, his cheerfulness, consistent helpfulness, and witty comments.”

“Jay and I were on five Camino Pilgrimages in Europe together. We probably walked 1,500 miles together over a total of about five months. I will miss him,” Don Walton recalls. Jay was active with Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy and helped with river clean-up with Asheville Greenworks.

“But he was a man of many passions,” remembers Paula Massey, his long-time companion. “Jay was an avid festival goer and would attend many festivals within a one-hour radius. He also supported local entrepreneurs and would always buy a special sauce or jam or handmade gift at the tailgate markets, even if he didn't need it. He just wanted to be supportive.”

On a personal note, I met Jay almost as soon as I moved to Asheville and joined CMC. Jay was my hiking friend and I will miss him.