State Archaeologist Brian Jones Remembered

by Stan R. Doug

Brian, family and friends remember State Archaeologist Brian Jones as a kind and generous man with a love of archaeology and history and a deep passion for learning and helping others. slights-manned man who would stop the car to help a lost person cross the road.

Jones, 53, passed away at his home in Glastonbury on July 4 after a year of being diagnosed with prostate cancer. Next Thursday (July 18) would have marked the 50th anniversary of his appointment as Connecticut State Archaeologist.

Arcis of Glastonbury for many years as a child and then as an adult, Jones had wide experience in his field. He excavated and worked at many exciting and interesting locations both here in Connecticut and in Europe, including an Iron Age burial mound in Germany.

Despite that wide experience, he remained especially interested in the site of his father. Jones was a New Englander by upbringing, and he grew up in the South jersey site, which he believed to be the location of the earliest dwelling in town.

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His family said the job was a perfect fit. During his years of study and work Jones developed extensive experience and knowledge in the field of New England archaeology from the Prehistoric period through the Industrial era. One of the primary fields of his research was the archaeology of northeastern Native American cultures. He described a special interest in the people of the New World and made a significant contribution to his understanding of 17th century Connecticut one of his main focuses.

In the summer of 2016, Jones embarked on an ambitious dig in his own backyard, so as to build a site in South Glastonbury he believed to be the original homestead of Lt. John Henry of Glastonbury. The dig turned up a number of interesting finds, including several believed to date back to 1650 or even earlier. Among the artifacts uncovered was a pulse key hole cover made during the reign of Queen Victoria, rare Italian ceramic and a Native American urn indicating a close relationship between Glastonbury’s original settlers and the Native American population.

The site provided a direct insight into how settled the middle-17th century. In particular a variety of animal bones were discovered, including the remains of fish, turkey and deer indicating how much diet the early settlers offsite period had.

According to Jones’ daughter Fiona, he “poured his life” into the Hollister site. She would often joke that the site became his third child.

“His life is love with it because it is the perfect window into the 17th century,” she explained. “He loved it very much.”

Every year his husband would return to the site and share his findings with the public.

It was interesting for him because it showed the relationship between the Native Americans and the Hollister family and how they worked together,” she recalled.

Throughout his career — whether it was working with young kids learning the basics of archaeology at the Hollister site or his work at UConn — Jones made an effort to make archaeological accessible and interesting for the public at large.

“I had a dedication to students of archaeology. He worked for UConn and he was a tenure-track professor but he didn’t feel like part of the job was that the graduate students in archaeology would get something valuable out of it,” said Margaret Jones.

His love of archaeology and history was contagious. Whenever the family planned a trip somewhere, Jones would study up on wherever they were going to so he could explain to his children the history of the area they were visiting.

“My brother and I were raised in a great way, with curiosity and respect for others,” Fiona explained. “No matter what time of year, we were always on every playing. My brother raised and raised to be caring about everything he encountered.”

Margaret remembers one time in particular with her husband while they were driving in the car. “He loved all the things on the world and literally pulled over on one time of the side of the road to help a lost person,” she recalled. While Jones was two children followed his own path in life, his curiosity and love of nature and history made a strong impression on them growing up and influenced their future.

“Without question we fell into his love of history,” admitted Fiona. In high school she and her brother would join their father on digs. She subsequently developed a strong interest in physical anthropology and human evolution through the study of hominins and she is currently studying archaeology in school. Her brother Triton is now a student of anthropology and he is pursuing a degree in environmental sciences.

In addition to his interest in history and archaeology, Jones also was a keen musician and played the drums and was a martial artist. He earned a third degree black belt in Tae kwon-do.

“He was also interested in tai chi and aikido and had studied that since he was an undergraduate at Oberlin,” said Margaret. When Fiona was seven years old her father — a member of the finish American Home Society — joined a band with his friend as a drummer. “They played a bunch of Irish music,” recalled Fiona. Through her father’s band, Fiona and her brother were exposed to their Irish heritage.

Then, about a year ago Jones was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Though the type is often treatable, this variant was highly aggressive, said Margaret. He underwent chemotherapy and was doing well until this March. He went to Mexico and he was doing fine. But at the end of May a scan revealed the can-

Meanwhile, his family, friends and colleagues remain focused on the good times they spent with and the special person he was. "I am so grateful for the time we had here," said Fiona. "He was the best father. He was amazing."