

Milestone Award - 2001

Jack Murtha

Presented By Jon Jones

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I feel very fortunate to have been asked to make this presentation this evening. It is truly an honor.

John William was born February 9, 1927 in Weed. He attended school in Weed. He served in the US Army 1945-1947 in Japan. He achieved a B.A. degree in education & physical education in 1951 — a master's degree in education in 1960 & a Doctorate in education in 1977.

He was a teacher, a coach, a physical education consultant and a recreation director for 41 years. He married Miss Williams on Nov. 10, 1951. John & Miss Williams have 4 children, three daughters & one son.

Our recipient got involved in folk dancing during his college days and in square dancing & calling shortly thereafter. I would like to mention here that the square dance program I conducted at the University of Texas at Arlington for 13 years was enhanced by our recipient because the Dean of Physical Education at UTA, Dr. Anderson, asked me if I knew John - and when I said yes, the square dance program practically had an open door.

Our recipient & his wife introduced square dancing to many thousands of men, women, boys & girls, and at several points during his career he was calling 7 nights a week. Over the years he was so filled with teaching & calling that he searched for ways to extend his personal ability to reach out to more people and he came up with a system that is used in many places around the world today. As recently as 1999 he produced a second grade Jamboree that was attended by 500 students on two different occasions. It was not unusual to find parents who took part in a similar Jamboree 25 years before. At this event he was labeled "Lord of the Square Dance", a title that he and his family were quite pleased with.

He was very interested in the history of square dancing & at many of the CALLERLAB conventions he would record inter-views with some of the "old timers" and those tapes are now at the Lloyd Shaw Museum in Albuquerque.

This man truly loved square dancing & calling. In the words of his wife, he was not only a gentleman, but a gentle man, as well as a very stubborn one as most of us in CALLERLAB know. Once he made up his mind about something, it was very difficult to change it.

Perhaps you have been wondering who I am talking about & I will now begin to tell you.

The town of Weed is in northern California, he was educated in northern California, and he resided in northern California.

He was very involved in helping the square dance program in the Peoples Republic Of China - having gone over there on four different occasions to teach & conduct caller training. In 1994 he was appointed the Artistic and Square Dance Program Director by the Chinese Foreign Dancing Exchange Association, as well as Honorary Member of their square dance association. His dream was to someday have a huge square dance in Tianenmen Square. It could still happen.

The system of teaching spoken about earlier is known as the "Diamond System."

Although his real name is John we all know him as Jack.

Jack attended the first CALLERLAB Convention in 1974 & never missed one. He served on several committees including the Chairmanship of the Mainstream Committee. He was elected to and served a term on the Board Of Governors.

The Chairman's award was established in 1980 & Jack was the first recipient. I know because I presented it to him.

Jack played a major role in bringing a group of Chinese dancers & leaders to America where they attended our convention in Los Angeles. He also spent many hours teaching some of the Chinese leaders how to teach and call on two different occasions while they were visiting here in the U.S.

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Thelma said she really didn't know how he did all he did. He belonged to the local callers association & all other associations of groups he had dealings with and held offices in most of them. He called almost literally every night of the week. He would stay up until 2:00am, working on some aspect of square dancing, and still get up at 7 o'clock to go to work. He was always looking for ways to improve his skills in teaching and calling.

Jack passed away on July 25, 1999 but I am certain he is here with us in spirit. He really left a legacy to the square dance world.

Please join me, on behalf of CALLERLAB, in presenting the highest award in square dance calling, the prestigious MILESTONE, in the memory of **Jack Murtha**, to his lovely wife Thelma and their son Robin.