



John **ASHER** ('90)

Journalist, spokesman, storyteller, family man, Hilltopper. Words that describe the life and career of **John Asher ('90, L)**. But for many people, including those in the horse racing industry, Asher was known as "Mr. Derby."

In his two decades as Vice President of Racing Communications at Churchill Downs, Asher became synonymous with the Kentucky Derby. A lifelong horse racing fan, Asher was a walking encyclopedia of horse racing and the Kentucky Derby.

His booming baritone voice coupled with keen insight, quick wit and heartfelt words could captivate an audience. The man who never met a stranger easily related to billionaire horse owners, workers in the stables and fans in the grandstands.

Asher, who grew up near Leitchfield in Grayson County, covered the Kentucky Derby as an award-winning radio journalist for WHAS and WAVG in Louisville, where he earned five Eclipse Awards for "Outstanding National Radio Coverage of Thoroughbred Racing" as well as other honors from the Society of Professional Journalists, Radio and Television News Directors Association, Kentucky Broadcasters Association and The Associated Press.

He landed his dream job at Churchill Downs in 1997 and became Vice President of Racing Communications in 1999. As publicist for the track, Asher was charged with promoting and protecting its legacy. In 2001, he helped lead the \$126 million renovation of the historic facility.

Asher's horse industry honors include the Kentucky Thoroughbred Owners' Warner L. Jones Jr. Horseman of the Year award; the Charles W. Engelhard Award for excellence in media coverage from the Kentucky Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders; the Dean Eagle Award from the Knights of Columbus; and a media award from the Kentucky Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association.

Asher received a bachelor's degree in Journalism from WKU and was well-known for his support of and enthusiasm for his alma mater. A Lifetime Member of the WKU Alumni Association, he was a member of the WKU Greater Louisville Alumni Chapter and a member of both the Mahurin Honors College at WKU Parents Advisory Council and the WKU Alumni Association Board of Directors, where he served as President in 2007-2008. Asher also received a Volunteer of the Year Award from WKU and was honored by the WKU School of Media.

Asher died Aug. 27, 2018, at the age of 62. He is survived by his wife, Dee, and three daughters.

Among the tributes after his death: The John Asher Scholarship Fund was established at WKU; a portion of Kentucky 259 near Leitchfield was renamed as the "John Stephen Asher Memorial Highway"; and a section of Central Avenue near Churchill Downs was renamed as "John S. Asher Way."

