



Print Page

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Professor James M. Bingham

Professor James Morris Bingham, 67, of Bowling Green died at 4:10 a.m. May 2, 2009, at Greenview Regional Hospital.

The Saltillo, Tenn., native was born in 1941. He was an assistant professor of geography in the Department of Geography and Geology at Western Kentucky University and a Baptist. He earned his B.S. in geography, history and political science from Memphis State University in 1963, remaining at MSU to complete a master's in geography in 1965. His thesis, titled "Northwest Hardin County: A Study in Industrial Development," presaged Jim's lifelong interest in planning and economic development. He arrived at WKU in the summer of 1965 as a geography instructor and taught a number of general education and planning-related courses over the following five years. In 1970, Jim received a teaching assistantship from Indiana State University to pursue a Ph.D. in economic geography. Although Jim only spent two years in the program at ISU, the experience and coursework broadened his academic skills and he arrived back at WKU in 1972 to take up an appointment as assistant professor in geography, receiving tenure in 1977. Over the years, Jim teamed with former department head Wayne Hoffman on dozens of research projects related to city and regional planning, not only through the Center for Local Government, but through partnerships with local and regional government agencies. He published as an author or co-author several articles and planning reports, presented his research findings regularly at regional and national meetings and received funding support from numerous local, state and federal agencies, especially in the 1980s. Jim contributed to his department, college and community in myriad ways over the past 40 years, serving on innumerable committees, advising WKU's Gamma Theta Epsilon chapter and working with area P-12 schools to promote geographic awareness and science education. Jim loved teaching and was widely appreciated as a tough but fair professor who always went out of his way to help a student if the student showed a willingness to improve. A few student comments illustrate his no-nonsense approach to teaching: "He's the kindest man ... he does expect the truth from students and is a 'straight shooter.' If you lie to him, you had better be prepared for the consequences. He's as smart as a tack and loves what he does." "Overall, he is a fun instructor with numerous stories and anecdotes, but his tests are the bane of human existence." "I just wanted to tell you that I really enjoyed your many classes I took at WKU. I still tell some of the stories you once told me. You are a credit to WKU as you make learning fun. That was a pretty tough time in my life and I really believe you helped keep me in college." In recent years, Jim suffered several health challenges and he opted for transitional retirement in June 2007. Jim was an engaging teacher, a feisty character and a lifelong geographer. He believed in challenging students to rise above their own expectations and he pushed them to change the world. He will be sadly missed by friends and colleagues. Professor Bingham was a member of the Masonic Lodge and former president of the Iris Club in Bowling Green. He was a son of the late Earl and Erah Gott Bingham.

Funeral is at 6 p.m. Wednesday at J.C. Kirby & Son Funeral Home, Lovers Lane chapel, and is at 2 p.m. Saturday at First Baptist Church in Saltillo. Visitation is from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tuesday and from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday at J.C. Kirby & Son. Visitation is also from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at First Baptist Church in Saltillo. Shackelford Funeral Directors in Saltillo is in charge of arrangements in Tennessee.

Expressions of sympathy may take the form of contributions to the WKU Foundation, c/o Geography Department, in memory of James N. Bingham, 1906 College Heights Blvd., No. 31066, Bowling Green, KY 42101-1066.

Online condolences may be made at www.jckirbyandson.com.

Survivors include several nieces, nephews and cousins.