

OBITUARIES

JAMES D. BEEBE, 73

Trombonist became longtime bandleader of Chicago Jazz

By Barbara Sherlock
Tribune staff reporter

Through a long career begun as a teenager when he discovered the trombone and jazz, James D. Beebe earned respect by being steadfast as a musician and person.

"Jim was very much a straight shooter—what you saw is what you got," said reedist Eric Schneider, referring to his personality and playing.

Schneider was invited in 1977 to join Mr. Beebe's newly formed band, Chicago Jazz.

Schneider said Mr. Beebe was self-effacing and "was a very good trombonist who preferred to be part of a great ensemble, rather than perform as a soloist."

Members of his band past and present applaud his skill as a bandleader.

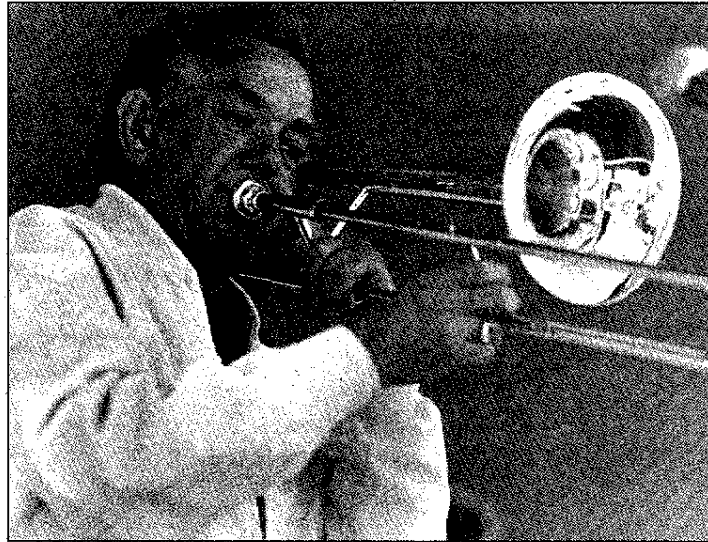
"Jim was an unusual bandleader. I don't think there will be another like him," said Judy Erickson, his life partner who joined his band as a singer in 1987. "He had a way of working the musicians and the people in the audience—a charisma that was mesmerizing to the audience."

Mr. Beebe, 73, who had wavy hair parted on the left and a slight furrow over heavy eyebrows, played his trombone in the Chicago area for more than 40 years, loyal to the traditional jazz identified mostly with the '20s and '30s.

He died of lung failure Sunday, Aug. 29, in a La Crosse, Wis., hospital. Mr. Beebe, formerly of Northbrook, moved with Erickson to Wisconsin last year to be closer to his family. He was twice married and divorced.

When he was a young boy his family moved from Nebraska to Sparta, Wis., where he took up the drums in elementary school. He switched to the trombone in high school and became infatuated with jazz.

He enrolled in Beloit College, initially to become a doctor like his father and grandfa-



James D. Beebe was a stalwart on the Chicago jazz scene.

ther, but two years later the Korean War began and he left college to join the Marines. While stationed in California, he played trombone in its band and cut his teeth professionally by sitting in with the famous Bob Scobey band.

After his discharge, he enrolled in music education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

His prior sessions with Scobey paid off about 1957, Erickson said.

"Scobey liked what he did and invited Jim to join his new band, and that was the beginning of his musical career," she said.

The band made its way to the Chicago area, where Mr. Beebe remained for the rest of his life, except for several years in the 1970s when he toured across the country with Art Hodes' Stars of Jazz and with the Celebration Road Show.

"Jim specialized in what's called tailgate trombone—it's a real gusty, growly sound," Erickson said. "He could do trills like no one else. It was like he was blowing bubbles."

During the 1960s he played with the Dukes of Dixieland and with Bill Reinhardt's band at Jazz Ltd. In 1972 when Rein-

hardt formed a band to play in Flaming Sally's at the Blackstone Hotel, Mr. Beebe became its trombonist. Five years later he took over the band, forming Jim Beebe's Chicago Jazz.

He and his band became familiar to audiences in the 1980s at Dick's Last Resort in Chicago and Braxton's Seafood Grill in Oak Brook.

Mr. Beebe was a great fan of letter writing, and sometimes his letters made their way into newspapers, such as the Chicago Tribune, when as a former Scientologist, he voiced his opposition to the Church of Scientology.

"He had a personality that suited his playing style and instrument," said friend Peter Maiken, a retired Tribune features editor. "He had sort of a brassy side when he wanted to. If he didn't agree with you, he would tell you in no uncertain terms... but he was always fun to be with."

Other survivors include his sons, Jim Jr., Jeff and Ryan; his daughters, Holly Wilson and Christie; his sisters, Betsy Goodnough, Linda Goodwin and Ann Knopfle; his brother, Tom; and four grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Saturday in Wisconsin.