

Thomas Jefferson Hughes Jr. was inspired for the bearded bumpkin "Uncle Looney" by a character in the play "Tobacco Road," in which he once appeared.



File

# Fans mourn 'Uncle Looney Toon'

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The generation that grew up with Roanoke's first television station has lost one of the most beloved personalities of that era.

Thomas Jefferson Hughes Jr. — better known to children and adults alike as "Uncle Looney Toon" — died Tuesday night at age 84.

Hughes was one of the television pioneers who launched Roanoke's first station, WSLs-TV (Channel 10), on Dec. 10, 1952, said retired Program Director George Chernault.

Hughes read the opening station identification announcement when programming began for the first time

that evening.

Like many of those first employees, Hughes performed all manner of duties at the station — producing, directing, announcing, writing and acting, said longtime friend and co-worker Dick Burton.

Primarily, though, Hughes was an announcer and featured performer on a variety of programs, Burton said.

His most widely recognized and best-loved character was "Uncle Looney Toon," the host of an hour-long cartoon program that aired each weekday at 5:30 p.m. The show began in 1955, Burton said, and continued into the early 1960s.

The "Uncle Looney" character was inspired by a character from the play

"Tobacco Road," in which Hughes had once appeared.

The son of a Roanoke physician, Hughes attended Augusta Military Academy, the University of Virginia, Emory & Henry College and Roanoke College, from which he graduated in 1935 with a degree in biology.

A life on the stage called him away from a life of science, however, and he went to New York to study acting. Over the next six years, Hughes appeared in many productions, including Orson Welles' "Julius Caesar" and one with Van Johnson.

Hughes was teaching acting in

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