

Decades of service at Providence Baptist Church

Ministers celebrate 25, 35 year anniversaries

JACOB WILDER
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

BEAUREGARD — The wrinkles on their faces are testaments to the good and bad times in their lives. They speak softly as their eyes stare off into space, summoning stories of the ministry they have shared. And they both grin when asked what has kept them at the 150-year-old Providence Baptist Church.

Church ministers Dr. Rusty J. Sowell, pastor, and Dr. Thomas R. Smith, music minister, will celebrate their decades of service to Providence Sunday, April 26, at its 10 a.m. church service. According to church records, the two are among the longest serving ministers in Providence history.

Sowell, 53, has served the Beaugard church for 25 years, and Smith, 65, has been the music minister there for 10 years longer. These anniversaries follow the church's 150th anniversary. Both men have served in the church's current building, and plan to be with the church as it opens its new fellowship hall within the next month.

From inside his book and manuscript filled office, Sowell explained that there are no guidelines on lengths of service in the Baptist church.

"My favorite part is the relationships with people," Smith said as if reminiscing on days past.

The music minister recalled the relationships he developed through directing church choirs, leading worship and working on projects. With 35 years at providence, Smith said that there are countless relationships he had made with members and the community.

The love of fellowship is shared between the music minister and pastor. Sowell said that he enjoys the relationships and sense of community in the church. Sowell is particularly known at the church for enjoying church luncheon's and often jokes about it.

"I like the table fellowship," the pastor said. "It's not just the food, but the camaraderie."

The pastor makes a point to say that he does not eat turnips or collards.

"I don't eat anything a hog will fight



Dr. Rusty J. Sowell

you over," Sowell said with a chuckle.

Both Sowell and Smith agree that the fellowship and the relationships at Providence influence their involvement. The two ministers also gave credit to God.

"It's a calling," Sowell said. "When the Lord leads differently, you move in that direction."

Sowell said that unless God calls him elsewhere, he will stay with Providence. Smith said that he has stayed to follow God's plan for his life.

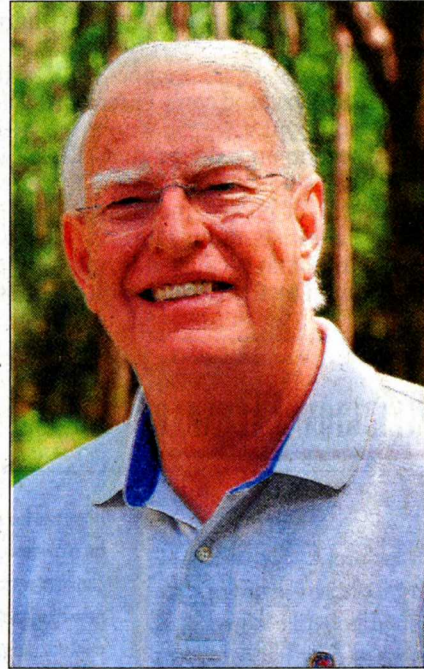
"The leadership of the Lord is a wonderful thing," the music minister said.

At a young age, Smith said he felt called to the music ministry. After holding a few other music minister positions, he came to Providence. It may come as no surprise that his favorite hymn is "Wherever He Leads I'll Go."

Smith said that he remains called to Providence, and that his ministry is still fresh and exciting.

"I feel like the Lord is not through with me at Providence," Smith said.

Before ministering at Providence, Sowell had been pastor of two other churches. Sowell smiled as he talked about how remaining at Providence



Dr. Thomas R. Smith

had provided stability for him and his family.

"In any relationship there is a certain level of commitment," Sowell said.

The pastor said that he desired to remain committed to the church and the community that he has grown to love. Providence has allowed him to do that.

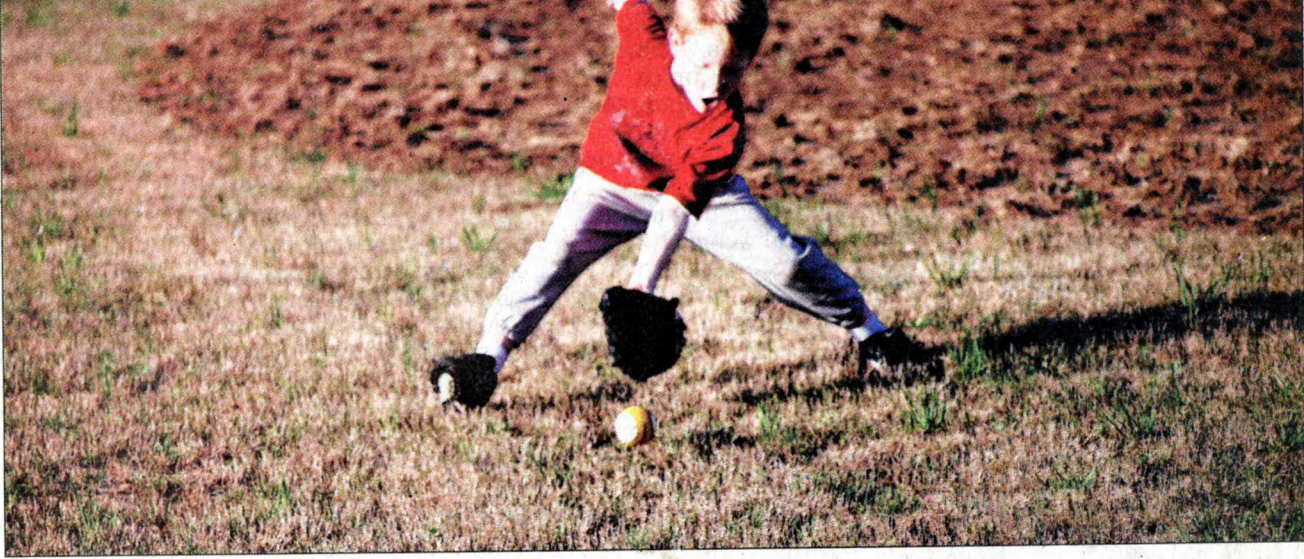
"It is nice for people to have a minister that they can call on at any time," Sowell said.

The two ministers work closely together to prepare worship services and other church events. Sowell said that if he did not have such a close working relationship with the music minister, his job would be very difficult.

"I just can't imagine, nor do I want to consider, ministry without Dr. Tom," Sowell said.

The pastor said he credits God for his ministry, citing John 3:30 in the bible, "He must increase, and I must decrease."

"Any positives of my ministry can be credited to my wife and children," Sowell said with a smile. "If there is anything negative, well, that's just me."



PHOTOS ARE SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

Ryan Ward, 5, practices fielding with his father at Providence Baptist Church's recreational fields Tuesday, March 17.

Providence Baptist Church supports Beauford athletics

Beauford Youth Athletics Tee Ball League to play at church recreational fields

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BEAUFORD — This spring, Providence Baptist Church has provided its recreational fields to the Beauford Youth Athletic Association's 10-team tee ball league.

"This right here was God sent," Bill May, vice president of the BYAA, said.

Before Providence's invitation, the athletics association only had two fields at Beauford for the league. Two fields would have made scheduling games for the 10 teams difficult. Beauford's tee ball league has an average of 15 children per team. May said that this is due to players from Opelika and Auburn who come to play with the BYAA because of their three pitch then hit off the tee rule.

May said that the BYAA welcomed the opportunity to expand. The association had a need for extra space, and the church saw that need, he said. BYAA members voted unanimously to approve the move.

Providence has started two baseball fields that should be game ready by the time the season starts on Saturday, April 4.

Providence had set up the fields for the church's mission to reach out to



Ethan Parmer, 4, practices his batting for his tee ball team the Express Tuesday, March 17, at Providence Baptist Church's recreational fields.

the community. Once church members saw the need, they approved the project.

Along with the baseball fields, the recreational fields include a walking track and a concession stand with restrooms. May said that the association is also considering the fields for football practice in the fall.

"It's a good thing that the church is doing this," Lisa Parmer said. Parmer's son Ethan, 4, plays for the tee ball team the Express.

The fields are close to being completed, May said.

Rusty Henson is a deacon at Providence and assistant coach for the Sidewinders tee ball team. Henson and other members of Providence hope to have the field ready by Mon-

day, March 23.

"We are going to smooth all the dirt and cement all the bases," he said. "We have portable pitching mounds so we don't have to worry about building those."

May said that everyone he has spoken with liked the idea of using the church recreational fields.

"This is a protective environment away from the road," May said. "It's a good deal."

Providence Baptist is located in the Beauford Community of Lee County at 2807 Lee Road 166. It offers a wide range of music and mission opportunities for all ages, as well as men's and women's ministries. For more information, contact the church office at 334-745-4608.