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# Horizons2010

A progress edition of The Clinton Chronicle



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# Ruth Sharpe is Citizen of the Year

By Nick McCormac  
Horizons 2010

Dedicating yourself to a single cause for nearly half your life can earn you numerous accolades, recognitions and praise, regardless of whether you feel you deserve them.

Ruth Sharpe of Cross Hill has earned such thanks during nearly four decades as an advocate for the treatment of individuals suffering from mental health disorders and the loved ones who help them, and because of that she can add one more metaphorical trophy to her shelf.

For her service over the years, Sharpe has been named The Clinton Chronicles's Citizen of the Year for 2010, an award she said she takes with humility.

"I can't find the words that adequately express my thanks," she said. "I don't feel as if I've done anything in my life worthy of this kind of recognition."

Since 1971, Sharpe has worked with various organizations to help be a voice for individuals with mental health disorders, and more recently has turned her attention toward the family members, friends and other loved ones of those individuals.

It was a struggle that was all the more personal for the majority of Sharpe's life.

Back in the 1940s, Sharpe's late husband, James Edward, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She said she knew during their whole marriage he suffered from the disorder, but it didn't diminish her love for him.



Being the organist at the First Baptist Church in Cross Hill has been a passion for The Clinton Chronicle's 2010 Citizen of the Year Ruth Sharpe for the past 26 years. Like being an advocate for individuals with mental health problems, playing the organ is something Sharpe said she loves dearly and plans to do for the rest of her life. Below, Virginia Hipp, Ruth Mitchell and Ruth Sharpe enjoy some time together after a recent community lunch at the First Baptist Church in Cross Hill.



"I knew it would be hard, but I wanted to be someone who could be there for him, which a lot of people with mental disorders didn't have back then," she said.

Edward didn't receive treatment for his disorder until the 1960s, but Sharpe said treatment of mental illness back then was more like a Band-Aid compared with how it is today.

"Today, medications have been perfected and discovered which help treat illnesses much better," she said.

In 1971, Sharpe joined the board of directors at the Beck-

man Center for Mental Health, which provides mental health services for Laurens County and beyond. She was also working at E.L. Mansure in Clinton as the secretary to the general manager, but after retiring in 1989 had more time to devote toward what she considers her true calling.

In 1993, Edward passed away after 52 years of marriage, and Sharpe focused all her attention toward the betterment of individuals with mental illness.

She joined the Mental Health Association of Laurens County - now Mental Health America, Laurens County - and, with the help of some friends and fellow mental health advocates, set up a local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. She still works with each of the organizations.

Unlike organizations such as MHA, which focuses on individuals dealing with mental health disorders, NAMI is an advocacy group for family members of consumers, the term used for individuals receiving mental health services.

Having been the loved one of a consumer gave Sharpe a better idea of how to approach family members and how she could help them, she said.

"[NAMI] just felt so real to me," she said. "I was sensitive to the needs of the people and thought I could be of some help."

Sharpe has welcomed a new program called NAMI Connection, a recovery support group for consumers. What makes the program unique is that a consumer runs the meetings.

Sharpe, Page 11



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# Hogan’s hometown still at heart

By Bristow Marchant  
Horizons 2010

Billy Hogan’s many paths through life may have led him away from Clinton, but they haven’t let him get very far.

This Greenville attorney and former Red Devil lives with his family just up the road in Simpsonville, and regularly visits his parents Bill and Esther Hogan in his old hometown.

“I miss not living in Clinton,” he said. “Growing up there, you knew everybody in the neighborhood. In Greenville, you might know two or three people in your neighborhood. Living in a big city, it’s much more impersonal. I miss that.”

Today, sitting in the well-furnished offices of the Gilreath Law Firm, he remembers growing up in Clinton’s small-town atmosphere, where his father was involved in real estate and owned radio station WLBG.

“That was a lot of fun,” he said. “Growing up in a town the size of Clinton, I pretty much knew everybody there that was my age.”

At Clinton High School, Hogan was involved in several school activities, primarily as a tennis player, before he graduated with the class of 1979.

“At Furman, I roomed with a guy from Atlanta, and he asked me when I had lived in a big city, and I said ‘right now,’ and he said ‘this isn’t a big city,’” Hogan said. “To some people, I guess Greenville isn’t a big city, but it seemed like one to me because I didn’t know everybody.”

As a student at Furman



Greenville attorney Bill Hogan lived and worked in his hometown of Clinton before moving to the Gilreath Law Firm. His 18 years practicing law have included an appearance before the U.S. Supreme Court. — Photo by Bristow Marchant

University, Hogan wasn’t sure what his future career path would be. He was torn between business and the law, so he split the difference and became a history major — “a good background for a career in the law” — with a minor in economics and business.

By the time he graduated, Hogan seemed to have decided on business, going on to get his MBA from the University of South Carolina. Before he finished school, he got a job with a company called Southern Plastics in Columbia.

“I started as an hourly worker as a student,” he said. “I cut parts with machines, I did work on the production

line, worked all different shifts.”

Hogan says that experience was invaluable once he got a job as a manager with the company after receiving his degree.

“I learned how to do the job from the ground up,” he said. “I learned what the workers go through. It gives you an understanding of the hurdles of the job, in addition to the technology involved... It was really eye-opening.”

After a few years in the Columbia facility, Hogan was transferred to the corporate headquarters of Southern Plastics’ parent company, American Filtrona, in Richmond. There he was put in

charge of the marketing department. He was only on the job six months, but his time in Virginia proved to be worthwhile when he met his future wife.

Jeanie Jones’s parents were old family friends of the Hogans. Her father Frank Jones was a former head football coach at Presbyterian College.

“She was actually born in Clinton, and then her family moved away when she was just a couple years old,” Hogan said. “Her father left PC after they went to the Tangerine Bowl to go to Mississippi State, and then he went to the University of Richmond, which is how I met her.”

“We joke that it was a pre-

arranged marriage,” he said.

But for now, the couple would have to make do with a long-distance relationship, because after a short time in Richmond, in 1989 Hogan decided to go back to USC and get his law degree.

“That’s always what I wanted to do,” he said. “In business, you need to have an expertise, and mine was not engineering. I wanted to have an area of expertise.”

Earning his law degree in 1992, Hogan returned home to set up his law office in Laurens, a general practice with friend Jim Bryan. A couple years later, Jeanie followed him down and they were married.

“We stayed in contact, but we waited until I was out of

law school to get married,” Hogan said. “Our oldest child Sam was born in May of ‘95, and our daughter Clare was born November ‘99.”

The new family settled in Clinton — in a house on Jones Street, ironically enough — and started a new phase of life.

“I enjoyed being there,” Hogan said. “It was near the college, and we were there with a lot of people I knew.”

After nine years in Clinton, however, Hogan wanted an opportunity to take on a business practice, to combine the two spheres of his life. That’s when he was put in touch with James Gilreath.

“We met through a professor I had (at USC law school),” he said. “He was looking for someone new, and my professor recommended me.”

Today, Hogan specializes in business law, estate and tax planning, and corporate litigation.

“I’ve always enjoyed business, the structure of various transactions, how you can do it one way versus another way,” he said. “Being a history major gives you an appreciation of how societies develop, and the law is a reflection of that development. A large part of it is the history of why a law was created. There was some specific problem, and laws were created to deal with that.”

Hogan also feels his background as an executive gives him common ground with his businessmen clients.

“I understand business suits,” he said. “I know what management is facing. That’s always helpful. It’s always useful.”

Now Hogan is taking the next step in his journey in his spare time, earning his masters in tax law in an online course from the University of Alabama.

“We talk over the internet, and there’s a video connection with the professor. It’s pretty amazing,” he said. “You log on for two hours a night twice a week, so it’s hard to balance that with work and with family.”

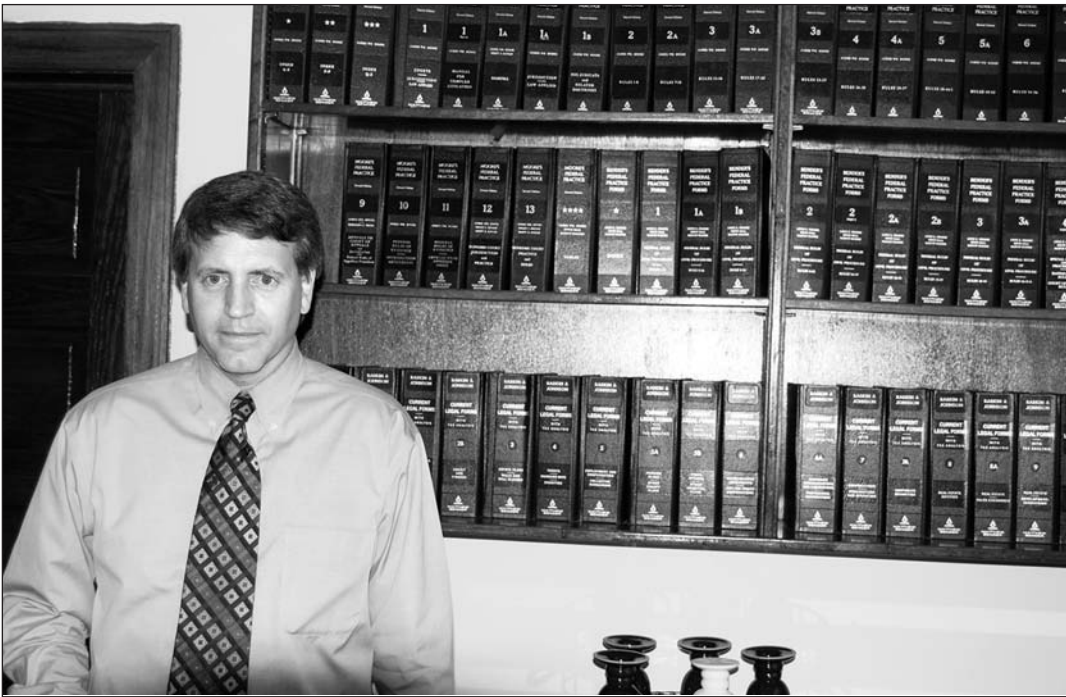
But his job has given him the opportunity to work with bigger and bigger cases. In 2005, he was a co-counsel with Gilreath in a case — Wachovia v. Schmidt — that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

“I took the whole family up to Washington to see it,” he said. “It’s something sitting at that table with the justices just 10 or 15 feet away from you. It’s like they’re sitting on top of you. And it’s very solemn, very quiet, you don’t feel like you can make any movements. The bailiff makes sure everybody keeps their seats.”

Hogan doesn’t think he’ll ever get another chance to appear before the highest court in the land. But with all the other twists and turns in his life, you never know.



A young Billy Hogan with the family dog, Snoopy. Hogan grew up in Clinton, and played tennis at Clinton High before going on to Furman and a career in business and the law. His father owned WLBG in Laurens.



Bill Hogan and his law books at the Gilreath Law Firm in Greenville. Hogan combined his twin passions for business and the law by becoming an attorney who specializes in business issues.



# Much more to Tommie Ruth than letters

By Bristow Marchant  
Horizons 2010

Her name appears in The Clinton Chronicle almost as much as any of its paid contributors. Anyone who regularly reads the paper's letters to the editor recognizes the name Tommie Ruth Nelson, but other than her proficiency as a letter-writer, most people don't know anything about her.

Nelson is a long-time Clinton resident and retired nurse who lives at Glendale Manor. She's well known to longtime Chronicle readers for her frequent letters extolling biblical passages, Christian values and an unswerving faith in God as the solution to the many problems in what she often seems to perceive as a dangerous world.

It's a worldview shaped by a life steeped in hardship and tragedy, but also an abiding sense of justice and a concern for the fate of others.

Nelson was born in Belton in 1933, the oldest of five children, the daughter of mill workers.

"They worked at the Belton mill. Daddy was the boss in the weave room and mama was a weaver," Nelson said, reminiscing in her Glendale apartment about her family history. "I moved to Clinton as a child, and then we moved to Enoree. We lived all over this area."

But Nelson wasn't destined for a simple childhood. Her father deserted her mother, and when she was unable to take care of her five children on her own, Nelson, her two brothers and two sisters were sent to live in an orphanage in Columbia.

An orphanage in the 1940s was not an easy place to live. Because she wasn't truly an orphan, her father was expected to pay for the children's rent. When he didn't, Nelson had to work for her room and board, with little attention from the adults around her.

"The couple that ran the kitchen would water down milk, they would steal the meat that was sent to us for themselves," she remembers. "They put a little bit of food in the middle of the table and everyone would reach for it. If you asked for any more they wouldn't give you any."

Complaining could get a child locked in the "dungeon" underneath one of the orphanage houses. "That filled me with a lot of hatred and vengeance," Nelson said.

But speaking today, she delivers the details of her childhood in a very matter-of-fact



Tommie Nelson puts pen to paper at her home at Glendale Manor. A frequent and long-time letter-writer, Nelson always has something she wants readers of The Clinton Chronicle to hear. — Photos by Bristow Marchant

way, as if accepting this was the fate dealt her for some higher purpose. At the time, however, Nelson knew something was wrong with her situation and reached out for help. She wrote a secret letter to the welfare department and covertly set out to have it delivered.

"I couldn't send it from there because they would take it, so I snuck out one night and found a mailbox down the road," she said. "I didn't know who to send it to, so I wrote on it 'Mr. Mailman, please deliver this to the welfare department. It is important.' And I dropped it in."

She didn't know what happened to her letter until four or five weeks later, when her group was walking outside and "all these fancy cars pulled up."

"They fired the man in charge and the people in the



A retired nurse, Tommie Nelson has become a devout and vocal Christian after a lifetime of hardships, including time in an orphanage and the deaths of her siblings.

kitchen, and all these police officers came to protect us," Nelson said. "That was the first time I learned that the pen is a mighty weapon."

Even then, the orphanage must not have been a happy place, because she ran away at 16 and got married to Ralph David Nelson, a Clinton mill worker. The newly-minted Mrs. Nelson then began the long process of gaining custody of her younger siblings.

Nelson always felt protective of her brothers and sisters, so she was hit hard when two of them died untimely deaths. One sister committed suicide, and her brother was killed in a barroom brawl. Those events would lead her to a religious conversion.

Her sister's death was especially painful. "It killed me," Nelson said. "I thought 'I could have saved her.' I just kept thinking 'if, if, if.' The only thing I had to turn to then was Jesus."

Even today, Nelson finds a regular source of strength in her faith. "I've read the Bible many time, but it still comes popping out at me," she said. "I didn't use to like Ecclesiastes, but now that I'm older that pops up to me more and more."

Nelson says church helped her reconnect with her two surviving siblings, Reba and Walter. "They're both alive and well, thank God," she said. "I got both of them in church, and as far as I know they still go today."

She also has two half-brothers, Milford and Wayman, and a half-sister Rachel from her mother's second marriage.

Nelson later became a mother of her own, with "one precious son and three beautiful

girls." The younger David is "a free-lance floater" who works with horses and does odd jobs on a local farm. Nancy is a nurse, and Deborah and Sandra were recently laid off from their jobs at a plant in Simpsonville and a mill in Pelzer, respectively.

Today, Nelson works part time as a private-duty nurse for families with elderly members, and spends time with her 10 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

Family is important to her. She still regrets that during her time in the orphanage, her family home burned down, destroying the family Bible and all trace of the lineage it recorded. Nelson has tried to retrace that history ever since.

"Mama was a Sircey, and her mother was a Stowe," she said. "I've never found many of them. They could come from the man in the Moon for all I know."

Her father was an O'Shields, a family that came over from Ireland in the 18th century and settled mostly in Virginia.

Nelson does have one memento from her mother's side of the family; a old photo of her grandmother's mother that a cousin found for her. She's now turning it into a painting, another childhood hobby of hers.

"I won a contest in the orphanage with a painting of a rooster," she said. "I got to ride in an airplane."

Nelson feels her passion and creativity are a direct gift from God. "Sometimes the Lord will wake me up in the middle of the night with

Tommie, Page 11



An amateur painter since childhood, Tommie Nelson's current project is based on an old photo of her great-grandmother, unearthed by a cousin while she researched the family's genealogy.



Tommie Nelson puts faith and scripture at the head of her household, literally. She also enjoys branching out from her own church and visiting other houses of worship. "I've found God everywhere I've been," she says.

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# Cooper Motors all in the family for 70+ years

By Nick McCormac  
Horizons 2010

For more than 70 years, the Cooper family name has been synonymous with automobile sales in Clinton.

Back in 1938, Lynn Cooper, Sr., opened his first dealership in town, servicing cars out of an old brick building on West Main Street.

In 1956, another Lynn Cooper - this time junior, senior's son - took the reins from his father and continued to carry on the family name.

And like his father, Lynn Cooper, Jr., passed the torch to his son Lynn W. "Chip" Cooper III, who has run the family business since 1993.

Keeping the salesman mindset running in the family bloodstream for generations has led Cooper Motor Company - which now sells the Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge and Ford brands - to be a close-knit and family oriented dealership. And with the voice of an elder businessman on hand, they've managed to weather a tough financial storm and sailed back into the sun.

Unlike his father, Chip Cooper didn't always intend to spend his life in a dealership. After graduating from Clinton High School in 1988, he went to Appalachian State University to study architecture.

But the death of his brother-in-law in 1991 changed something inside his mind, and Cooper decided to shift his focus back to the family.

He changed his major to business, took a short break after graduating in 1992, and in 1993 started working for his father.



Lynn W. "Chip" Cooper III, owner of Cooper Chrysler Dodge Jeep & Ford, sits in his office at the dealership. Chip Cooper is the third Cooper to run the business since his grandfather, Lynn Cooper Sr., opened it in 1938. Chip's father, Lynn Cooper Jr. (pictured with him at left), took over the business in 1956 and handed it off to his son in 1993. - Photos by Nick McCormac

more about how to run the business than I did in the previous 18 years."

That responsibility has helped Cooper remain relatively unscathed. The dealership is still part of Chrysler's future plans and will be receiving new models in the future.

And best of all, said Cooper, is the fact that not one employee was fired.

"It should go without saying that our employees are the backbone," he said.

Cooper said the care he shows toward his employees is eventually passed on to the customers, bring everything full circle.

"Chip likes to keep the process slow and gear everything more toward the customer's needs," said Gary Kuykendall, a salesman for Cooper for nine years. "He expects each situation to be treated above board and makes sure he gets personally involved to ensure our customers have a good experience."

Car dealers in small towns have a better opportunity to connect with the community, Kuykendall said, and Cooper makes sure he can maintain a close relationship.

"People have been loyal to us through everything and kept us strong," Cooper said. "We have to be loyal to them."

Cooper said he can't stress enough how essential his employees and salesmen are to the business. Trying to be the best he can for everybody is a bar he sets high for himself, he said, but that only means he'll never stop trying to achieve it.

While he doesn't know if he'll be able to thank the community enough, Cooper said he and his employees do whatever they can to help, both on the off the lot.

The dealership supports the CHS Booster Club, contributes to the United Way and sponsors athletic events at the YMCA.

On his own, Cooper serves as an elder at First Presbyterian Church and the board of visitors at Presbyterian College. He also continues the tradition of having family in the business by having Miki, his wife of 11 years, help with the business' finances.

He's not sure if his daughters Ella, 6, or Lois, 4, will carry on after him. They're a little too young to tell, he said.

For the elder Cooper, seeing his son continue with the business through good times and bad makes him proud, and he said he thinks he son carries on traditions from car salesmen of generations past.

"I never forced Chip into the business. He grew into it even though it was a tough task to take on," Lynn Cooper said. "To be fair, car salesmen deserve a lot of the negativity associated with them, but I taught Chip to approach the business with a different, more community-based mindset, which I think he has."

when he can, but he prefers to spend his time surrounded by cases of classic model cars reminiscing about his heyday.

After Chip Cooper took over, business was steady on through the turn of the century, but about 18 months ago the tide began to turn as the economy began to sour.

With Chrysler going into and out of bankruptcy and Ford trying to stay afloat

without money from the federal government, Cooper began to deal with the hardships by taking a more long-term look at the business.

"Like most dealers, we had to drastically change our practices. We had to be more fiscally responsible, plan out advertising and expenditures better and look farther into the future," he said. "Over the past 18 months, I've learned

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New and old photos of Cooper Motor Company cover the walls of the dealership's hallways. The dealership was the first to open in Clinton and operated out of a brick building on West Main Street. It now occupies a larger area right down the road on East Main Street.



New vehicles dot the lot surrounding Cooper Chrysler Dodge Jeep & Ford in Clinton.



# Smith carries on family name & business

By Nick McCormac  
Horizons 2010



Smith Chevrolet Cadillac owner William Smith, center, tells coworkers Will Sharpton, Bobby Cook and Greg Garrett to act like they're working. Smith said there are certain lessons his father taught him growing up that he tries to pass on to employees - Photos by Nick McCormac

Passing down life lessons and words of wisdom from father to son is an age-old tradition that has allowed successive generations to learn lessons from the past.

For William Smith, those kinds of lessons have helped him and his business, Smith Chevrolet Cadillac, stay afloat during tough times.

Smith's late father and uncle, twins Ike and Abe Smith, started the company back in the 1930s after Ike Smith returned from fighting in Europe during World War II.

Over the years, the dealership saw its fair share of automobile brands come on and off the showcase floor. During its nearly 80 years in operation, the dealership has sold Pontiac, Ford, Jeep and Oldsmobile, but finally settled on Chevrolet and Cadillac back in 1990s.

Smith said he always had an interest in joining such a storied family business. He worked there throughout high school and whenever he was home from college, and after graduating from the University of South Carolina in 1979 with a degree in business, he started working as a salesman at the dealership.

"I kind of gyrated toward what my father wanted me to do, but I was never pressured into it," said Smith. "He was one of those 'old school' auto dealers you really focused on the business side, and that kind of drew me in from the beginning."

Smith has worked at the dealership ever since, and in 1995 signed on as the owner.

Having seen the business change over the years and having insight from his father into the mindset of salesman from ever further back has proven priceless, said Smith.

"The way the business was



Alex Smith and his father, William Smith, share a moment in the showroom of Smith Chevrolet Cadillac. William Smith took over the store from his father but said he doesn't know if Alex will follow in his footsteps.

run 50 years ago absolutely shaped the way I run it now," he said. "What I do now has become easier because of the diligence of my father and his brother."

That business model includes maintaining a calm and levelheaded approach to any situation, both good and bad.

"My dad always taught me that things are never as good as they seem to be and things are never as bad as they seem to be. You have to keep a good perspective and a leveled outlook through good and bad," he said.

That advice came in handy more than ever in recent years, he said. When GM took bailout money from the federal government, Smith said he knew he would be fighting an uphill battle

against angry customers in addition to fighting off his own frustrations.

"It was really hard to accept GM had taken the bailout money," he said. "I didn't want to have that weight on my shoulders and I didn't want customers to have it either."

But things might have been much worse had the companies completed died out, and everyone was forced to make hard decisions.

Still, even through all the frustration he fought through, Smith said he saw no drop in confidence among his customers or employees.

"People know GM makes dependable products with great quality, and that has kept them coming back even through it all," he said.

Even through the eco-

nomie turmoil of the past year, Smith said he's seen his customers and employees maintain a positive attitude, which in turn has kept his outlook strong.

"Everyone, all small businesses included, have had to change their approach toward money matters, but through it all I've always thought back to what my father would do, and that's help me carry on," he said.

Smith knows the business is a completely different animal from the time when his father ran things. Dealers have to wear many different hats and conduct a constant juggling act to keep things running smoothly.

But one thing that hasn't changed much at the dealership is how customers are treated.

"There's no magic formula or silver bullet for making people happy with their car buying experience," said Smith. "You have to conduct diligent, honest, hard work day in and day out."

Without having such a learned and levelheaded predecessor in the business to learn from, Smith said he doesn't think he'd be the same salesman or owner he is today.

"I definitely learned a lot from my father," he said. "The lessons of the past served me well, as they should a lot of people. You just have to be smart enough to look back at them."

Smith still keeps some family in the business. His cousin, Ann Bishop, serves as a vice president at the dealership.

As for Ivy Smith, his wife of 22 years, she's content with keeping herself separate from the business, he said.

And their son Alex Smith, 12, doesn't seem to be following in his father's footsteps.

Having been a Laurens resident his whole life, Smith tries to stay involved with community activities when he can. He works on the board for the local Habitat for Humanity chapter and helps to support activities in the local FCA and YMCA.

But he said he truly feels at home on the showroom floor, where decades of insight and advice have helped him carry on the family name.



## Clinton Family YMCA

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Sunday  
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## Family YMCA of Greater Laurens

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William Smith talks with a customer outside of the dealership bearing his name. The dealership has been in Smith's family since his father and uncle, Ike and Abe Smith, started the company back in the 1930s. Smith has seen the store grow from a small shop into the larger, more modern dealership it is today. The original shop is still next to the new dealership and still performs vehicle service.



# Service with a smile through thick and thin

By Nick McCormac  
Horizons 2010

Being the owner of a car dealership these days can be a rough, risky and sometimes thankless job.

With American car manufacturers asking for help from the federal government and consumers being wary of making such a big purchase from a faltering company, it can be tough for dealership owners to maintain a positive attitude.

Baldwin Buick Pontiac GMC in Laurens is one of the General Motors-centric dealerships in the country labeled as a “wind down dealer,” meaning they have been cut from the auto giant’s future plans and won’t receive future models for the brands they sell.

This hasn’t deterred Bill Baldwin, the owner of the dealership bearing his name. After decades in the business, he has little interest in giving up and plans to maintain his dealership’s role of providing friendly, quality service, even in the face of adversity.

Baldwin’s been a GM man since he was 24 years old. He deployed to Germany after graduating from The Citadel but said he quickly decided the military wasn’t the kind of business he wanted to be in for the rest of his life.

He returned to the states looking for a job, and at the encouragement of his father - who had been a car dealer since 1946 - joined a Pontiac Cadillac dealership owned by a family friend in Bufort in 1972.

“I grew up with it since my



Baldwin Pontiac Buick GMC, located on North Harper Street in Laurens, will be renamed Baldwin Automotive when the dealership stops receiving new models this October. Owner Bill Baldwin said the dealership will still provide service on vehicles and will shift its focus toward selling used cars. - Photo by Nick McCormac

dad had been in it for so long,” said Baldwin. “He really encouraged me follow in his footsteps.”

From 1973 to 1987, Baldwin worked for his father with the “one day, this will all be yours” promise always in the back of his mind. His father was a big boost, said Baldwin, and someone who was always quick to show him the ropes.

Unfortunately, his father was also a realist, and when financial troubles hit, the dealership had to be sold to an outside party.

“Needless to say, I wasn’t

happy about that,” said Baldwin. “It really hurt that I had been promised that for so long and could do nothing as I watched it all go away.”

But the setback didn’t deter him for long. In 1987, he moved to Laurens and purchased what used to be Don Nelson Buick on North Harper Street, rebranding it and adding a few new brands of automobiles.

“In the car dealing business, you sometimes just have to go where the opportunity is,” he said. “While Laurens may not have been my first choice back then, I’ve really

grown to love the community and found out it really was a good fit.”

Baldwin said he enjoys the business for the opportunity to help people with their “transportation situations” and prides himself on providing the customer with a family-friendly experience with as little pressure as possible.

Like his father, Baldwin keeps his family in the business. Kathy, his wife of 34 years, works in the dealership’s office, and their son Jason works as a salesman.

Fighting off the negative connotations sometimes asso-

ciated with car dealers can be tough, he said, but doing whatever possible to combat them is an essential part of his business.

“I may not be able to convince everyone, but we’re honestly not here to play games. We’re here to help and ensure people really have a good experience,” said Baldwin.

Even with times in the automotive industry at the lows they are, Baldwin has managed to keep a positive attitude. While they’ve stopped receiving new models of the brands they sell and will be

officially cut off on Oct. 31, 2010, they’ll still be around providing service and selling used cars.

“The dealership will be re-named ‘Baldwin Automotive,’ we’ll still provide service and repairs, we’ll expand the number of pre-owned vehicles and we’ll be able to save the consumer thousands of dollars on nearly-new vehicles,” said Baldwin. “Nov. 1 won’t be a stopping point. It’ll be our new starting point.”

Baldwin said as a dealer who’s been loyal to the brand for so long, it’s hard to understand how he could be cut away so quickly, and why so many other dealerships were forced to enter the same “transitional stage” as him.

“Over time, you get attached to the brands your sell. They really stay with you, and it can hurt when you get cast away like that,” he said.


Even with the deck stacked against him, Baldwin said customers can still expect the same service with a small, just without any new 2011 models on the lot.

Baldwin’s passion for helping the residents of Laurens County extends outside the rows of vehicles on his lot. In years past, he’s been the head of both the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce and the board of the Laurens County Health Care System.


He’s also a member of First Presbyterian Church, a place he once saw a sign that struck a chord with him.

The sign said “Now entering the mission field,” and at first he thought it was facing the wrong direction, but realized it had a deeper meaning.

“It got me thinking that wherever I am, on or off the lot, I need to do whatever I can to help.”



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Blake Tumblin, a mechanic at Baldwin Pontiac Buick GMC, stands next to his boss, Bill Baldwin, in the dealership’s service facility. With all the struggles the brands he sells have gone through recently, Baldwin said his employees have kept a positive outlook. The service department will become even more important when the dealership stops receiving new vehicles later this year, he said.



Baldwin watches security cameras placed around the lot. He has worked in the dealership business since 1972, following in the footsteps of his father, who had worked in the automotive business since 1946. As part of GM’s downsizing plans, the dealership will stop receiving new models beginning Oct. 31, but Baldwin said he will continue to provide service and support for current GM owners.





Jim Firmin stands outside of his Ford dealership in Laurens. Firmin opened the store in 2003 after working various jobs for Ford Motor Company since 1984. Firmin said he's the first person in his family to work in the automotive business.  
- Photos by Nick McCormac

# Staying Ford tough, the Firmin way

By Nick McCormac  
Horizons 2010

In the world of car dealers and dealership owners, many businesses are passed down from one family member to the next, keeping the family name prominent throughout generations.

If that's the case, then Jim Firmin is a rarity.

He has no family in the business to take the reins from, no storied history of predecessors from years gone by. Instead, the owner of Firmin Ford in Laurens started from the ground up, making his beginnings more challenging.

Firmin, born in Baton Rouge, La., first got started in the automotive business in 1984 after graduating from Louisiana State University with a degree in industrial management. He was looking for a job and found one with Ford Motor Company in Charlotte.

"Working with cars wasn't something I really grew up with and I never intended to get into the business, but it seemed like an interesting opportunity," he said.

He worked as a field representative for the Carolinas until 1990 when he shifted from manufacturing to sales as a general manager at a Ford dealership in Greenwood. After 13 years there, he moved to Laurens and moved up in the ranks to be the owner at his current dealership.

Like many salesmen-cum-owners, Firmin had the opportunity to see many different facets of the automotive industry, from the inner workings at the manufacturing plant to the business side as an owner.



Ford trucks on the lot at Firmin Ford wait to be taken to a new home. Owner Jim Firmin said growing up, he was told the only thing he had was his name, and he runs his business in the most honest and straightforward way possible.

Starting a dealership out of the blue was hard work, he said, but he thought he came in with a well-equipped toolkit.

"Working in all the different jobs I did, it helped build my strengths, my weaknesses, and helped me see the positives and negatives from each angle," he said.

While he felt like an outsider when he first started the dealership, Firmin said he felt he earned respect quickly and picked up on the rhythms of the industry.

Compared to other dealerships and other brands, Firmin said his shop has been running smoothly. When Ford refused to take bailout money from the federal government, Firmin said he saw an influx of people who were proud of the brand.

"I was very thankful to not have that weight on my shoulders," he said. "I think Ford showing that they're willing to stand on their own feet without much help really

stood out to customers and has drawn more of them in."

That's not to say Ford hasn't faced its share of struggles recently. In December, the company announced it was offering a buyout to all of its 41,000 salaried workers.

Whether the effects of that maneuver will trickle down to Firmin is unclear, but he's made it known to his employees that they're the priority to him.

"We have 20 employees at the dealership and four managers, three of whom have been with me since day one," Firmin said. "I've made it clear to them I hate turnover and will do whatever to keep them with me."

Firmin also stresses to his employees that honest and clarity are what should be the most important issues to them.

"Growing up, I was taught the only thing I had is my name, and that character and integrity are what should be most important," he said.

"Every owner, myself included, knows it's essential your employees reflect the owner's attitude and protect their name."

He said that while it may shock many people, some of the most honest people he knows work in the car industry, and that things have changed from dealers of years gone by.

What's also changed is the way Firmin and his employees approach the business following last year's economic downturn.

"I think we're at the bottom, but it looks to me like we're recovering," he said. "It was a definite speed bump and we all have to

work harder and smarter."

Also unlike many dealers, Firmin keeps his personal and professional life separate. He worked with Donna, his wife of 25 years, for a while, but quickly realized it would be better to keep family and work separate.

And his two children, 19-year-old Matthew and 16-year-old Jennifer, haven't shown much interest in following in their father's footsteps.

Still, Firmin follows the path of many local business owners by staying planted in community involvement. He currently serves as a member and former board chairman of the Laurens County

Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club of Laurens.

"I'm in the same boat as every other business owner in the city," he said. "We have to stay involved in the community and give back to the people that gave so much to us. Not only is that what we should do, but it's most certainly the right thing to do."

While Firmin said he hasn't had his name out in the industry long enough to have parents pass on word to their children, he's slowly beginning to see repeat customers begin to trickle back in.

If that continues, he said, he might have ended up making a name for himself.



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Jim Firmin, far left, stands with some of the employees that work at his dealership in Laurens. Firmin said the dealership has 20 employees and four managers, three of whom have worked with Firmin since he opened the store in 2003. Pictured are Firmin, Ed Caldwell, Jerry Bailey, Delfino Gomez, Curtis Sprowl, John Palman, Cathy Hughes, Toby Dillard, Zeke Benjamin and Tim Freeman.



# Dirt moving & riding in Simmons' bones

By Bristow Marchant  
Horizons 2010

"We move earth."  
That's how Scott Simmons describes his job.

Simmons is a surveyor. He maps out a piece of property and delineates its boundaries for private owners and companies looking to build — to "move earth." It's a job he's been doing now for 20 years.

A Clinton native, Simmons graduated from Clemson in 1987 with a degree in economics, and got a temporary job with CNGA.

"I always liked to work outside. All through college and the summers I would work jobs outside for the city or the Clinton-Newberry Natural Gas Authority," he said. "When I graduated, I decided to work a summer job at the gas company and I ended up working there two and a half years."

But Simmons soon decided working with gas was not what he wanted to do. "I started to get restless," he said. "Then one day, I was driving down the street and I saw two surveyors working along the side of the road. And I said 'I think I'd like to do that,' because you get to be outside all day, but it's not like you're digging ditches. It takes some skill."

Simmons talked to Foad Tarbert, a professor at Presbyterian College whose summer classes Simmons had attended. He soon came back with a job offer.

"He called me and said these people at the beach were building a golf course, and would I like to move to the beach," Simmons said.

He did, and thus began his career in surveying.

A surveyor's job involves



At Christmastime, Scott Simmons relaxes at home with a magazine. Simmons commutes daily to a construction job in Columbia, where he does surveying. He's also been an avid rider of dirt bikes for years, going back to the first bike he got at 12. — Photos by Bristow Marchant



marking off a site and scientifically determining its features and possible uses.

"Traditionally, we do boundary and line surveys for someone to build houses," he said. "Now, I do more construction work, curbs and gutters, all facets... Right now I'm doing a lot of estimations. I look at a set of plans for asphalt, curb and gutter work, moving stones for gravel. That's what we do, we move earth. And then I give them prices. But I'd rather be out surveying."

For 15 years, Simmons worked for a local company, Adtech, where among other projects he did grading for the Sterilite plant on Charlotte's Road. Then for several years

he worked as an independent surveyor, something that would have been difficult to do at the time he started in the business.

"One person can now do in seconds what at that time it would take a crew of three people all day to do," he said.

Advances in technology have changed surveying drastically, he said, as digital technology and GPS mapping have made surveying quicker and much more exact.

"Everything's digital now," Simmons said. "(When I started), we had a device with a little mirror in for directing sunlight, then it would give us an analog readout on a little wheel. Most of them now use infrared, and some of them use lasers."

The development of highly accurate global positioning systems has also given surveyors a new tool. Today most engineers develop plans using GPS satellite mapping, setting specific control points on the corners of a property, and load the final draft as an AutoCAD (a CAD is a computer-aided design).

"In AutoCAD, you have a 3D model in a computer file that you can take in a handheld device and stake points on the property," Simmons said. "Then you can load it into the bulldozers and it can show you the nose of the dozer on the ground. It's accurate to within a half inch."

In 2007, Simmons took his current job with the Richardson Construction Company of Columbia, where he commutes to and from work every day.

He spends his spare time with his wife Patsy and two daughters Mary Kate and Anna Paige, or out in the woods with his favorite hobby — riding dirt bikes.

**Simmons, Page 11**

## 10 Special Reasons We Love Langston House



Cappy spends a lot of time with his owner, Cissy Davis.



Marge Griffin can relax because she "knows she is going to be taken care of by the staff."



Mabel Boozer is so glad her dog, James, can live with her in her apartment.



Virginia Heffner, Mary-Addison Morgan, and Wes Leonard enjoy being together at an afternoon tea party.



Debbie Ray brings delicious favorites from the kitchen to our table.



Alice Neighbors says she "loves not having to tend to day-to-day responsibilities by herself."



Jane Jacks says the best part of Langston is "being able to be laid back and independent."



Betty Eaker has "happily called Langston House her home" for over 8 yrs.



Wheeze Farmer states that his "family can relax knowing he is safe."



Ella Blalock has breakfast every morning in her apartment which is furnished with a kitchenette.



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# Woods' law: career shows fruits of labor

By **Bristow Marchant**  
Horizons 2010

Stephen Woods works for a nationally-renowned law firm with offices stretching from coast to coast. Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak and Stewart has clients in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston and Chicago.

Woods, a labor and employment attorney, could work in any of those cities, but he's stayed at the main office in Greenville partly because it's close to friends and family in his hometown of Clinton.

"It's nice to be close to home," he said, seated in the conference room on the sixth floor of the Ogletree building on Main Street, a vista of downtown Greenville in the window behind him.

"When I was a kid, I enjoyed having my grandparents live two houses up from me. Greenville was the logical choice for me because I'd had my two significant jobs here, it's close to home, has good business opportunities, a good cost of living, low crime. It's just a good place to live."

But Woods also enjoys the bicoastal relationships he's been able to forge through the Ogletree Deakins network. "What's great is having colleagues in offices all over the country, so I can live here and still do work for clients there."

Woods's roots in Clinton literally hang off of everything in town. His father Dan worked for the city laying electrical lines for 25 years before retiring as a supervisor ("When the power went out, so did he," Woods says). Mother Marlene is a former fourth-grade teacher at Joanna-Woodson Elementary School. Woods himself was a student at Florida Street Elementary School and Martha Dendy Middle School before graduating from Clinton High School.

A self-described "type A geek," Woods edited his high school yearbook and sang in the chorus, and otherwise "studied my ass off." For all the admiration he has now for his small-town upbringing, at the time he admits "nothing would do except to get out of Clinton."

Woods spent a year away

from home at Duke University, but found he didn't enjoy the campus life there. "I did okay academically, but not so great socially," he said.

So he soon found himself right where a teenager with wanderlust doesn't want to be: living at home with his parents, back in Clinton. He sent applications to Davidson, Sewanee, and Washington and Lee, and says he could have attended any one of those schools, but then something unexpected happened.

Coming home from Duke to see old friends and familiar sights in Clinton, Woods found himself asking "do I really want to go anywhere else?"

Woods finished school at Presbyterian College, graduating with a degree in English and business. He served as student body president his senior year.

"The PC connections for me have been numerous and far-reaching," he said. "I told my professor Fred Chapman that I wanted to go into marketing, and Dr. Chapman said 'go tap into PC's resources.' It does open a lot of doors."

Now Woods can even appreciate his years at Clinton High. "Being a small town, you might not think it would be as substantive, but I found at Duke and PC that it gave me a great foundation in English, grammar, literature and math."

At the time, Woods wasn't yet thinking about a career in the law. He wanted to go into



Clinton native Stephen Woods stands by the window in the Greenville offices of Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak and Stewart, where he works as a labor and employment attorney.

— Photo by Bristow Marchant

business, and the business he choose was newspapers. In 1990-91, he got his first "significant" job with the Greenville News as a part of the paper's management training program.

"I sold ads, which I was not very good at," he said. "I wrote obituaries for the afternoon paper. I cleaned the presses. I set linotype. I was not real productive at any of these, I only had the promise of some kind of job at the end of it."

Woods eventually became the head of human resources at the News, a position he held for two years before one job led to a passion for another.

"I had to lay down the law on a daily basis when it came to things like hiring and firing," he said, "and that gave me the itch to go to law school."

In 1993, he entered the law school at the University of South Carolina. Upon graduation in 1996, he got another

job through his "PC connections."

"Jimmie Stewart is one of the partners here, and he's another PC alum," Woods said. "I wrote him a letter asking if I could clerk for him, and I got a summer assignment here in '95 and came back in '96 when I took a little test called the bar."

Woods calls Ogletree Deakins a "boutique" firm, meaning it specializes in labor and employment law, "from hiring to firing and everything in between."

"We work with companies only, not individuals," he said, meaning he usually finds himself on "the defense side, the management side."

With Ogletree's national

reach, "I get to work with some of the most interesting and innovative companies in the country."

Yet Woods rarely finds himself in court. He estimates that 70 to 75 percent of his work is "preventative counseling," dispensing advice to clients and smoothing over potential legal problems before they ever come before a judge.

"I might have a client say 'can I fire this person lawfully?'" Woods said. "If there's a list of people, you have to look for what's called a 'disparate impact' to make sure they don't discriminate unintentionally... It's a good thing I took statistics at PC."

He admits being involved

in firings and layoffs can be "less than fun," especially during a recession. For security reasons, Woods needs a special key to get the elevator all the way up to his office's floor, a precaution against disgruntled employees from previous cases.

But other legal questions can be fascinating. Recently, Woods has been dealing with cases involving the effects of H1N1 on employment. "Suppose you have a sick employee who doesn't want to go home," he said. "That brings up a lot of issues with wages, disability, medical leave laws. I've been busy with those questions."

Woods likes that his work and home lives can be so close together. He and his partner Kevin Lancaster live in the Parkins Mill area of Greenville, and he can regularly travel down I-385 to see his parents.


"I only have good things to say about Clinton," he said. "I enjoyed some of the best friends you could ever ask for, and I still see those folks a good bit. One old friend lives just a mile up from us. If you don't do it by intention, you won't keep up with those people."













Stephen Woods's law firm has offices in major cities from coast to coast, but he chooses to stay in Greenville because it's close to home. Before he became an attorney with Ogletree Deakins, Wood worked at The Greenville News as the head of human resources.



At work in his office, Stephen Woods says most of his legal work as an employment lawyer is "preventative counseling," dispensing advice to clients and smoothing over potential legal problems before they ever come before a judge.



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