

# The Tuscaloosa News

April 22, 2006

## Helping homes

**Transitional home for young men will be built in honor of pastor with legacy of mission work**

By Sarah Bruyn Jones  
Staff Writer  
April 22, 2006

The Rev. Milton Booth built homes. He built shelter for anyone who needed it. Whether a house was in shambles or destroyed by a tornado, he found a way to help.

"I don't think you have enough room in the paper to put all that he did," longtime friend Bill Abernathy said. "But he was just your basic person. He was just a pure simple person, but he was someone you had to meet to understand that. He was such a good person."

There isn't a count of how many houses Booth helped build, but his wife, Linda, said that didn't matter to him.

"He was kind of a behind-the-scenes kind of guy," she said. "He didn't toot his own horn.

"He didn't want his name in lights at all. He was low-key. He was so humble."

When Booth died on March 19, he left a legacy of homebuilding and mission work. He was 61. He held three titles when he died: pastor of Beverly United Methodist Church in Birmingham, missions coordinator for Birmingham West and missions coordinator for the Tuscaloosa District.

In honor of her husband, Linda Booth will be presented with a Lifetime Volunteer Award and Volunteer of the year award for 2005 from the United Methodist Children's Home on Monday.

One final Booth home

Now, a home is being built in memorial to Booth. While his name won't be in lights, the community is asking that Booth be the name of a duplex that will house four young men.

The transitional home will help men between the ages of 18 and 21 learn how to live on their own. The transition home will be part of the United Methodist Children's Home Alabama and West Florida system. It will sit adjacent to the Tuscaloosa Group Home in Cottdale, which is also part of the UMC system and houses foster children ages 12 to 18.

The duplex was not simply Booth's idea, but also his dream to see it completed.

Booth had talked about retiring. He would have turned 62 in July and knew it was time to slow down, Linda Booth said.



Amos, 16, practices "The Thrill is Gone" on the guitar in his room at the United Methodist Group Children's Home. The home is building an extra wing for young men who have been in foster care but are too old to stay in the children's home. The Rev. Milton Booth, who died March 19, had hoped to see the home built before he retired, said his widow, Linda Booth.

*Staff photos | Michael E. Palmer*

*Continued on next Page*

"But he had two things going that he wanted to see finished before he retired," she said.

The first was the transitional home. The other is a community garden, which also is still in the works.

To ensure that one of her husband's last projects would be finished after he died, Linda Booth asked for donations to the transition home building fund in lieu of flowers. People listened.

More than \$3,000 has been contributed to the fund in the pastor's name. And it has spurred even more contributions. Before his death, no money had been raised. As of Wednesday, \$10,000 had been raised, said Kristy Goodman, director of the Tuscaloosa Group Home and future overseer of the transition home.

Although the project has a way to go before the blueprints are finalized, the dwelling will probably be 1,600 square feet and early cost estimates are between \$40,000 and \$60,000, Goodman said.

"We are still trying to fully grasp what this project will entail and need to hear from more state and consulting resources to say when we will officially begin," Goodman said. "The naming aspect will unfortunately have to come later, after we resolve some of the building issues."

#### Transitioning into adulthood

On a recent Monday afternoon at the Tuscaloosa Group Home, the teenage boys who call this ranch-style brick house home were talking on the phone, watching Maury Povich's television talk show, watering the flowers, studying or practicing guitar.

Seven young men live in the group home. These are teens who, for the most part, are wards of the state. The Alabama Department of Human Resources has taken custody for a variety of reasons and placed these children in the custody of the UMC group home.

Years ago, the home would have been called an orphanage, but that term is now outdated and shunned for its negative connotations. All the children at the Tuscaloosa Group Home has some type of diagnosed disorder, Goodman said, and most likely will not be adopted.

The population varies, but at the moment several of the boys have been in the home for a number of years and are getting older. One is 19, another is 18, and soon they will have to leave the children's home. After all, they are no longer children.

"It's kind of 'see you later,' " said Goodman. "[The transitional home} is a way to help the foster care program and improve the lives for these kids. It gives them a chance to make it."

Too often, Goodman and the social workers at the home have seen these young men leave the home only to find trouble. They aren't ready to be on their own, she said. It's too big of a change.

"I don't know many of us who at 19 were really ready to live on our own," Goodman said. "They need parent figures, such as staff and volunteers here, to see the importance of getting training for jobs, paying rent and keeping steady work.

"When they leave, we lose track of them."

UMCH has built transition homes elsewhere in Alabama: Selma, Dothan and Mobile. Those homes have given the young men a few additional years to have guidance and independence.

*Continued on next Page*

The program provides an opportunity for our youth to practice independent living skills in an apartment setting. Residents in this program establish checking accounts, buy their own food, prepare meals, and make arrangements for transportation. Each resident must hold a full- or part-time job in addition to attending college or vocational school.

The residents are also responsible for paying bills, including rent. In Tuscaloosa, this money will be put aside as a savings for the young man. When he leaves the program, he will get this money to help him start out in the real world, Goodman said.

Jarvis celebrated his 19th birthday Thursday. He's been living at the Tuscaloosa Children's Home for four years.

"I've been thinking about where I'm going next," Jarvis said. Goodman asked that last names be omitted for the article since all the children are in the care of the state. "When I first got here, I didn't want to be in this place.

"Now, I know I've got somewhere to go, I got some people who care about me."

When the transitional home is complete, one of the slots has already been reserved for Jarvis.

"It's good 'cause I don't have to stay here with the younger kids. But I'm still kind of shaky about leaving all together," he said.

#### Booth's vision

As missions coordinator for the UMC Tuscaloosa district, Booth was heavily involved with the Tuscaloosa Group Home. He knew the boys and when he couldn't always be there, he found other volunteers who could help out.

"Not only did he volunteer, but he got other people to volunteer," Abernathy said. "That's what he did with me. He knew they needed someone out there, so he helped the group home by getting me to help."

Abernathy initially got involved by teaching the boys how to properly lift weights. They had the weight room, but no instructor. Now, Abernathy is a constant presence at the home.

"You couldn't say no to him," Abernathy said.

Linda Booth said she was going through some of her husband's recent papers when she came across a questionnaire. This form was something every UMC minister filled out annually. Kind of like a goal setting worksheet.

"The first question said, 'What are your goals and dreams in ministry?'" Linda explained. "He wrote, 'Meet the needs of the people.'"

The next question asked, how the previous goal would be accomplished.

"Just do it," Linda Booth said, "that's what he wrote.

"That's the kind of guy he was."