

SC pastor delivers last Sunday sermon

By MICHAEL P. HEGARTY
Staff writer

After more than eight years as the senior pastor of Bellevue Heights American Baptist Church in Sun City, the Rev. Stanley Brown is retiring.

His last sermon will be Sunday, his 70th birthday.

"I figured it's a good time, right on my birthday, after 47 years in the ministry," he said. "They didn't want me to go, but it's time to retire. I felt my age was essentially it."

Brown and his wife Dorthy will be going to Vacaville, Calif., and return to the Sun Cities as "snowbirds," he said.

"There are so many things I want to do," Brown said. "It will seem strange. Usually, I'll take a month's vacation in August, but then you come back. This time, I'm not coming back to the pulpit."

Instead, he'll be spending his time on the golf course, in a bowling alley or fishing at the nearest lake. He won't be alone; the memories of his days in Sun City will be fresh on his mind.

"My reflection is it was a very rewarding and fulfilling time in my life and a good experience for all of us," Brown said.

"I can honestly say I love these people."

He came to Sun City from Oregon where he was pastor of the First Baptist Church of Grants Pass for 23 years. His work there involved senior citizens, so he was prepared for the retirement communities.

"There were a lot of senior citizens there," Brown said, "and I think my experience with them was one of the reasons (Bellevue) elected me. Plus, I'm their age."

"I'm among my peers here."

Brown admitted it was "still quite a transition," he said.

"There is no youth or children or even young adults here. But the transi-

tion was made without any difficulty at all."

A difference in the congregations Brown quickly enjoyed was the involvement of the members.

"Everything is coordinated by seniors here," he said. "They're very capable and experienced. They take an immense burden from a pastor's shoulders in providing leadership."

Brown's involvement in the Sun Cities reached beyond his church. He served as the president of the Lakeview Rotary Club of Sun City in 1992-93, the Ministers Council of Arizona in 1990-91 and the Sun Cities Area Ministerial Association in 1988-89. He also served as moderator of the American Baptist Churches of Arizona from 1993 to '95.

"I've cultivated some good lasting friendships, and I'll continue those relationships," he said.

Brown has seen the church grow by more than 100 members since he arrived in Sun City (it now has 530 members). He said he's been impressed with the progress the church has made in its music programs and added new ministries, such as a singles group.

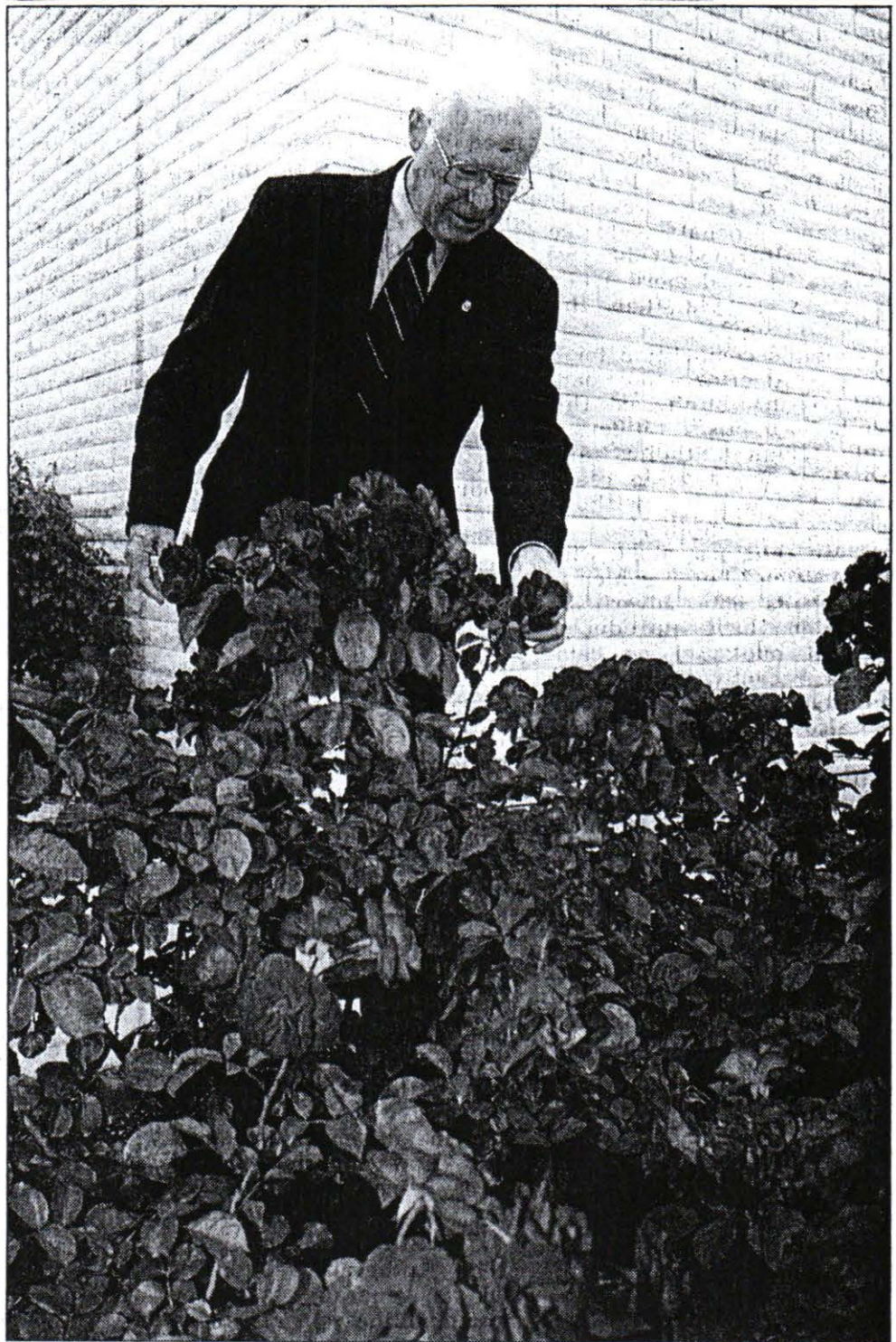
"A slow but gradual growth has taken place," Brown said. "We've added things here and there."

Brown also has helped Bellevue begin a new church in Sun City West, Palm West Community Church.

Bellevue assisted financially with the new church and also sent 30 of its members that lived in Sun City West and its pastor, the Rev. Dr. Wililams Kearns.

"The idea was fostered about six or seven years ago," Brown said about the church that held its first service in September 1993. "We felt it was time to go ahead with all that growth in the north part of Sun City West."

"They now have 150 members and plans to build a church," he added proudly.



Steve Cherek/Daily News-Sun

The Rev. Stanley Brown will have time to stop and smell the roses after he retires as pastor of Bellevue Heights Baptist Church in Sun City.

Historical bell tower has a peal

Second in a weekly series

By KIMBERLY HICKS
Daily News-Sun staff

From down the street the bell tower beckons visitors to Bellevue Heights American Baptist Church.

Built in 1975, the Sun City church holds the distinction of having what was once the largest pre-cast concrete structure in Arizona: a six-story bell tower.

"It is definitely a landmark," said the Rev. Stanley A. Brown, senior pastor. "It is one of the highest points in Sun City. It's the highest (spire) in Sun City, and one of the tallest in the state."

And it's only one of the unique architectural features of the church at 9440 Hutton Drive.

Scottsdale architect Francis A. Schulz, opting for a "Southwestern contemporary" style instead of the prevailing Spanish-colonial.

"The Episcopal church was being built across the street at the same time with a Spanish-colonial style. I tried to deviate from that," Schulz said.

What emerged was a five-sided building with an upward-jutting roof.

"Some people say it looks like a great whale coming at you," Brown said. "It's definitely one of a kind. I've never seen anything like it."

Schulz said he chose the unique shape to make the best use of space.

"When you have an altar up front and a choir on the side, you need the width up front. By flaring the sides back, we got a little better visibility from the overflow."

He said he was trying to "get away from the rectangle (design)" and create a building that could be added onto later.

Schulz only designed the fellowship hall and administration building. At

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**Rev. Stanley A. Brown
senior pastor**

the time the congregation was small, with less than 110 members.

"It was never intended to be a sanctuary, per se. We attempted to design a multi-purpose building with some ecclesiastical features," he said.

In 1984, architect Dean L. Glasco designed the 500-seat sanctuary to accommodate growing membership and complement Schulz's original plan.

Today, a series of covered walkways link the newer sanctuary with the original structures.

The striking element inside the sanctuary are the spectacular stained glass windows which adorn the altar and a large, lighted cross.

The ceiling is slanted upward to meet the top of the windows.

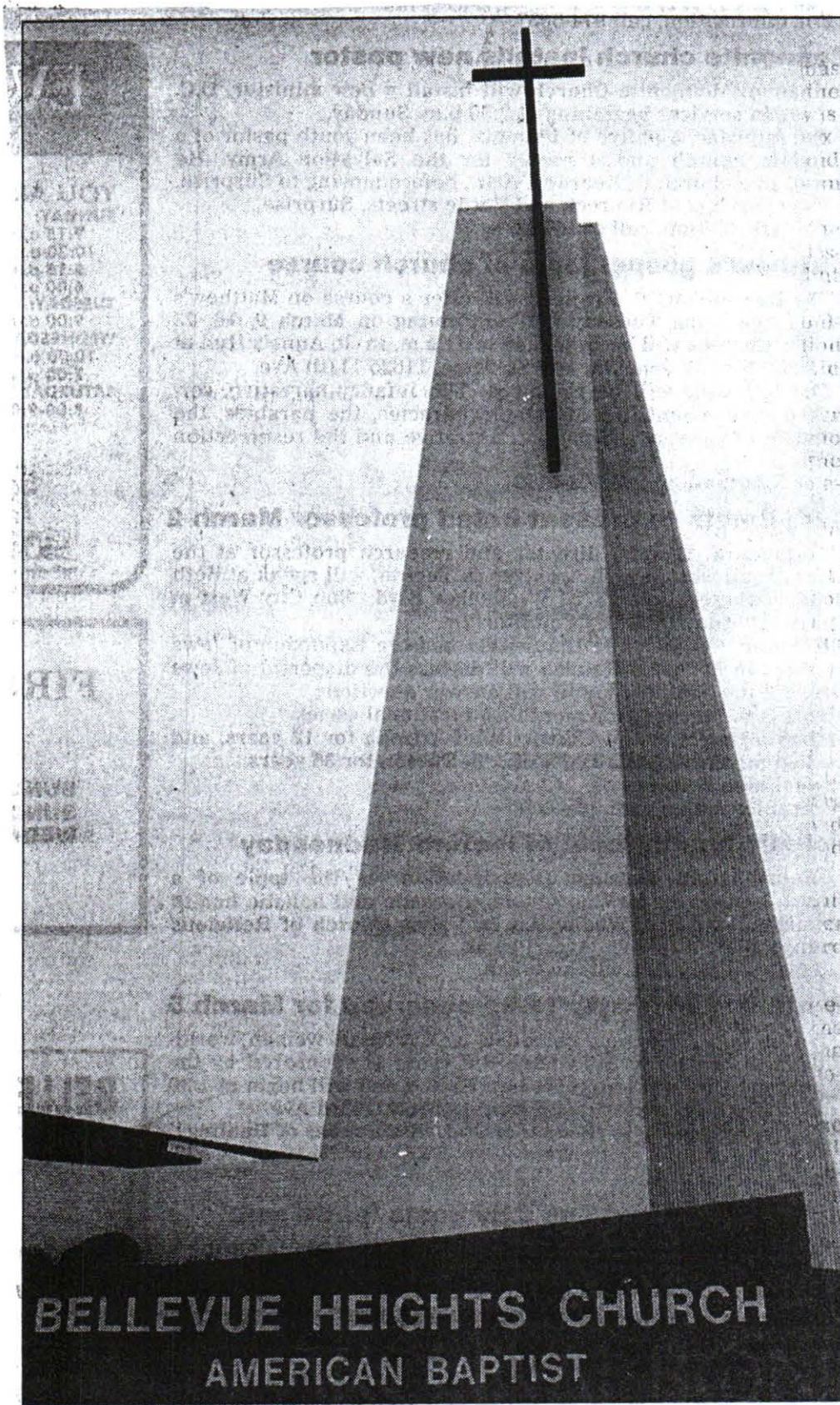
"It gives you a feeling of spaciousness," Brown said.

Other notable features on the six-acre church campus are its 270-niche, covered columbarium — added in 1985 — and a rose garden which draws visitors in the spring.

Church members also erected a flagpole in recent years, then watched as other congregations followed suit.

"It's an expression of our appreciation for God's blessing on our country," Brown said. "It marks our awareness that we live in a land with such freedom of worship."

Next week: Desert Palms Presbyterian Church.



Stephen Cherek/Daily News-Sun

The six-story bell tower at Bellevue Heights American Baptist Church, 9440 Hutton Drive, is among the church's unique architectural features. It is the highest church spire in Sun City.

Hard work powers dreams into reality for Bellevue

By PAT KOSSAN
Emphasis Editor

When the Bellevue Heights American Baptist Church congregation gathers Sunday evening it will hear Rev. David Burrows

echoing God's words to the children of Israel as they fled Egypt:

"God told Moses, 'Tell my people to go forward.' We'll go forward and dream dreams because dreams become realities."

Mr. Burrows will be very sure of himself and the powerful dreams of his 350-member congregation.

HE'S SURE because for the past 10 years, starting with 12 people in 1971, members of the American Baptist congregation have turned dreams into realities for themselves and their neighboring communities.

Harold Davis, an accountant active in national American Baptist administration and lay ministry, and his wife, Laura, moved to Sun City in 1970.

Each Sunday the Davises traveled 17 miles to the First Baptist Church at Central and Glendale avenues to attend services.

There they met five other Sun City couples anxious to attend church in their own community.

IN 1971 the group began meeting to discuss the dream that grew into Bellevue Heights.

During a visit to California, Davis bumped into old friend Rev. Charles Bell, retired from a Pasadena pastorate.

Davis' enthusiasm tugged at Dr. Bell's vocation and he eventually came out of retirement and was elected to serve as Bellevue Heights' first pastor by a unanimous vote of the 27 charter members.

"I did miss California," admits Dr. Bell, who still visits there often. "I came over with a promise to my wife of staying three years here." That was 10

years ago.

THE LITTLE congregation bounced from La Ronde Centre's First Federal meeting room to Youngtown and eventually to Lakeview Center where services were conducted for two years.

There was a choir of five (Davis sang soprano) and the church office was in Dr. Bell's spare bedroom. "The only thing the church owned," he said, "was some old donated hymn books and a post office box that I never did learn to open."

During the next three years a congregation that grew to 100 financed a church building on the corner of Burns and Hutton. "We didn't have to depend on banks for the building," said Davis who served as the congregation's first lay leader.

"The people financed it through notes and pledges. We added another building since then and both will be paid off at the end of this year."

BUT BELLEVUE Heights is far more than buildings.

"I'm thrilled with the growth and fellowship and love and concern people have for each other," said Davis, who now chairs the church's charitable foundation.

The love and concern have spilled over to effect the world and local communities.

congregation

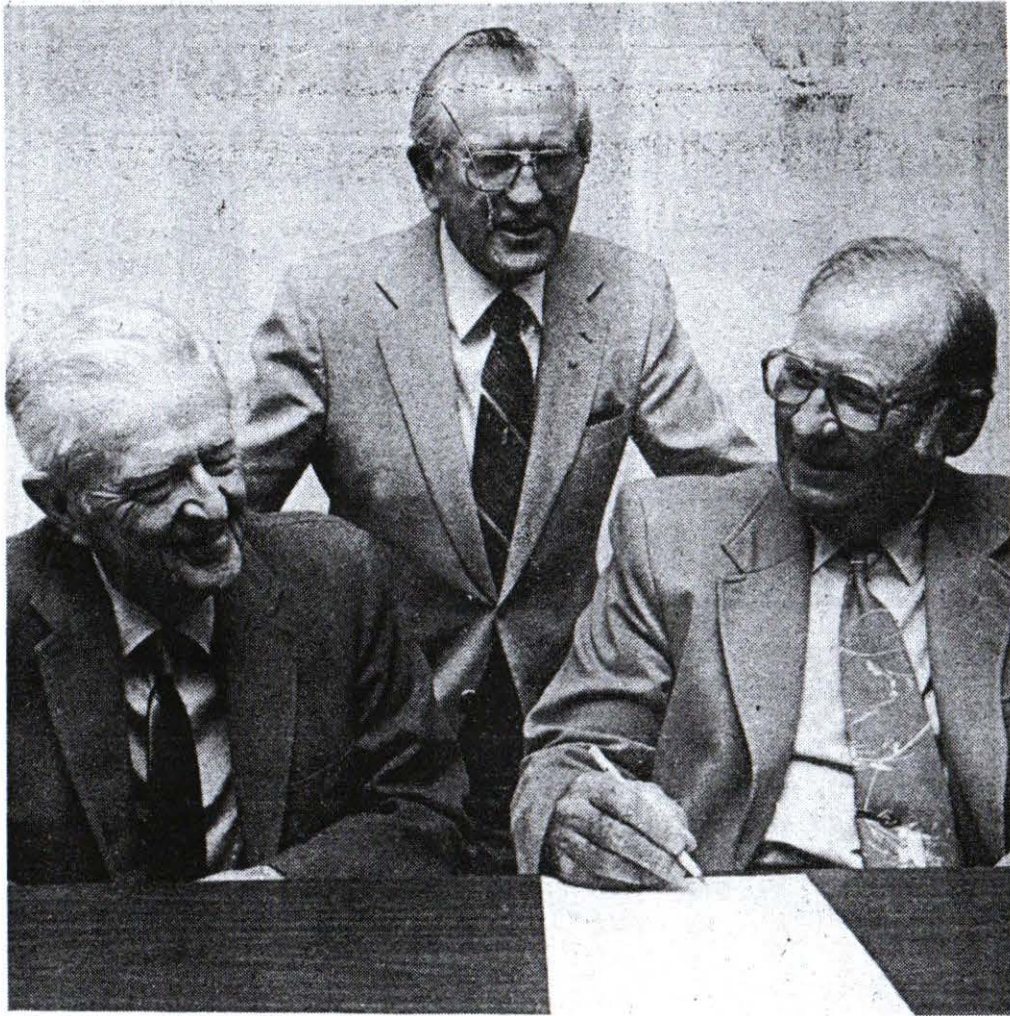
The group is a powerful force in making dreams realities for people as far away as Africa and as close as families on the Navajo and Hopi reservations, young people who are members of Valley Christian Center in Phoenix, itinerant farm workers in El Mirage and the area residents who spend their time in the Interfaith Services Adult Care Centers. Interfaith President Bill Wolfrey is a member of Bellevue Heights.

MR. BURROWS and his congregation are full of dreams for the future that include an El Mirage day care center for children of working parents.

Dr. Bell will begin the

congregation's 10-year celebration with a Sunday morning service. That evening the group will meet in All Saints of the Desert Episcopal Church

("Our sister church across the street.") for dinner and return to its own building for a service honoring founders and charter members.



Dr. Charles Bell, left, Bellevue Heights' first pastor, talks over the church's 10th anniversary plans with pastor Rev. David Burrows and founder Harold Davis. Davis, who served as the congregation's first lay leader, is chairman of the church's charity foundation and Sunday's celebration.

(News-Sun Photo by M.J. Hoppes)

Working together for good

Daily News-Sun staff

Members of a Sun City church group are proving home really is where the heart is.

Nearly three years ago, members of the Bellevue Heights Church American Baptist Men's Fellowship set out to raise \$25,000 for Habitat for Humanity. The non-profit, Christian organization based in Americus, Ga., uses volunteer labor and cash donations to build houses for the needy.

This month, they surpassed their goal, Men's Fellowship member Merle Groenwold said. The fund-raising effort resulted in \$26,879, which will be used to build a home in El Mirage for a waiting family.

It will be the 16th house built by Maricopa Habitat for Humanity, which concentrates its efforts in El Mirage.

Most of the volunteer carpenters are "retired guys" from Sun City and Sun City West, Groenwold said, and most of the money was raised by Men's Fellowship members and the church congregation.

He said the house should be dedicated in December. Groenwold, who also belongs to Maricopa Habitat for Humanity, said mostly young families are benefitting.

"It's been a very successful program," he said, explaining how new homeowners are given 20 years to pay back the cost of the home.

Members of Men's Fellowship were awarded a plaque by Maricopa Habitat for Humanity for their contribution.



Molle J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Habitat for Humanity volunteers from left, Bill Dines of Sun City; Roy Schucknecht of Sun City West; and

Bob Herzog of Sun City measure paneling for homes for low-income families in El Mirage.

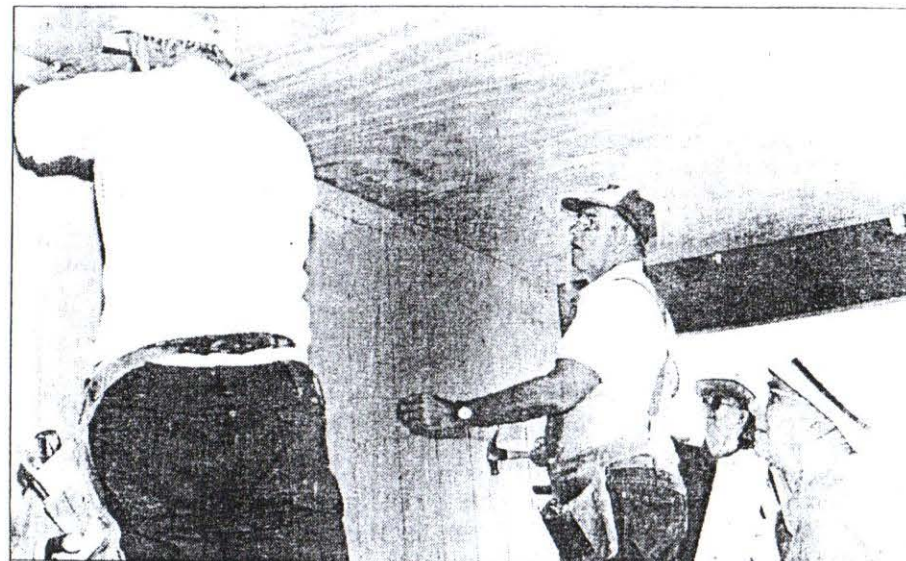
Founder celebrates a miracle

Daily News-Sun staff

Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity International, will present "A Celebration of Miracles" at 2 p.m. Saturday at Bellevue Heights Baptist Church, 9440 Hulton Dr., Sun City. The public is invited.

Fuller, 57, and his wife, Linda, founded the non-profit Christian housing organization in 1976. Their aim: to eliminate poverty housing from the world and make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action.

See Habitat founder, B2



Volunteers, from left, Warren Souza and Dave Bone of Sun City West and Bob Milne and Gordon Turner of Sun City work on the garage of a home in El Mirage.

Twin hobbies spur 'Holy City' vision



Tom Tingle / Staff photographer

Sun Citians Helen and Logan Reif combined interests in the Bible and gems to illustrate their impression of St. John's vision as described in Revelation 21-22.

By Betty Latty
Special to Community

SUN CITY — A delicate design of the Holy City mentioned in the Book of Revelation — constructed on a 16- by 22-inch plaque of fine walnut studded with gemstones and awash with gold leaf — showcases a Sun City couple's twin interests: the Bible, and gems and minerals.

"The Holy City" is Logan and Helen Reif's impression of St. John's vision of the city's descent from heaven, and his accompanying angel with a golden reed, described in Revelation 21-22. Their project took four years and included an international search for gems mentioned as the city's 12 foundation stones.

"At first, we planned to collect only the 12 stones to be inscribed with the names of the apostles," said Logan Reif, who teaches a Bible class at Bellevue Heights Baptist Church in Sun City.

Researching six translations of the New Testament, he found that only five stones — jasper, emerald, beryl, topaz and amethyst — have the same name in all six versions. "Even among authorities, there is a difference of opinion on the types, but I think I can make a good case for the ones we used," he said.

For the remaining seven stones, he chose lapis, chalcedony, sardonyx, carnelian, crysolite, chryso-prase and turquoise.

"We also wanted uniform size," Logan said. (Each of the 12 approximates 30 carats.) "They all have stories — we sent the carnelian back to Hong Kong three times for cutting because the engraver misspelled Bartholomew twice."

The emerald was elusive, the last to be found. A Colombian stone, it was acquired last year in

North Carolina.

The Reifs relied heavily on contacts abroad to locate and cut their choices, but they are not strangers to foreign mineral sources.

Ardent rockhounds for more than 30 years, they have spent their vacations traveling around the world to build a collection, now housed in a namesake museum in their hometown of Kalona, Iowa.

"We've been all the way from Australian opal fields to lead and zinc mines in Picher, Oklahoma," Helen Reif said.

"We've been places where mosquitoes were thick as lice and where a shower was almost un-

heard of."

The Reifs, who celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary in June, credit their youngest son, Douglas, with getting them interested in rocks back in Kalona, where the family has operated a department store for 106 years.

Their search for the Holy City's foundation stones expanded to a re-creation of John's entire vision.

They took their ideas to goldsmith-artist Jim Selinger in Colorado, who suggested the grained wood — "the kind used to make fine violins," Helen Reif said.

To depict bright heavens and to outline the walled city with its gates of pearl, Selinger used gold

leaf, after first sandblasting the top half of the plaque, then placing gold leaf in the grooves.

The finished lower portion of the wood represents the mountains through which the river of life flows down from God's throne, with two trees of life in the foreground.

For the "crystal clear river," the Reifs chose the sparkling quartz called Herkimer's diamonds; the trees, of fruitwood, include opals, malachite, azurite, coral, jade, turquoise and tiger eye among their fruits.

The 12 foundation stones, each inscribed with an apostle's name, are framed in 14-carat gold at the base of the plaque.

SC church mourns pastor



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Debbie Gamboa, front left, walks with her mother, Joann Swanson, into Bellevue Heights Baptist Church Monday morning for the memorial service for the Rev. Donald L. Swanson, who died unexpectedly last week.

UNEXPECTED LOSS: Family, friends eulogize the Rev. Donald Swanson of Bellevue Heights Baptist Church

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jack Swanson remembers racing up sand dunes and sliding back down the other side of them with his brother, Donald.

Those distant, happy memories carried Jack through his brother's memorial service Monday at Bellevue Heights Church in Sun City, where Donald was an associate pastor.

"I will miss that," Jack Swanson said, fighting back tears. "But now we know he is in a better place — in a place where we can meet all our family and all our friends. And we can meet Don, because he was very special."

The service, though fraught with pain at times, was more celebration than mourning. One of Swanson's good friends and fellow pastors, the Rev. Bud Abrams, summed it up: "Life is tough, but God is great."

Donald Swanson's unexpected death Oct. 19 left friends and church members searching for answers Monday morning.

"Before the memorial I was thinking about my father's life," said Swanson's son, Brian. "And I wondered why he died when he did. And I came to this conclusion: God loves my father too, and it was time for him to come home and sing God's praises in heaven."

Swanson, 64, was associate pastor of the church for the past six years. He died from complications associated with a routine heart surgery. Friends and family members gathered to remember him at the two-hour service at the church.

Swanson was active in all aspects of the church's activities, including coordination of prayer meetings and the church's extensive

See Congregation mourns, A5

(OVER)

Congregation mourns pastor

From A1

visitation schedule.

"Don was a man of God, a husband, a father, a grandfather, a pastor and a friend," the Rev. Boyd Baker said. "But he left so suddenly, it kind of left us with a big shock."

Friends and relatives who spoke at the service echoed each other's thoughts, describing Swanson as a good man who put his family and his faith at the forefront of his daily life.

Swanson's friend Dan Myers said the pastor never failed to open his heart to people, but in the end, it was his heart that failed him.

The church was at maximum capacity during the service, where friends and co-workers from throughout the country came to pay their respects and share memories of how Swanson touched their lives.

Brian Swanson couldn't hold back his tears as he talked about how much his father cared for him in the trying times of his youth, and how his father prayed for him and loved him.

"He was always friendly, even if he didn't know the person," he said. "Words cannot express how much I love him."

The memorial service was filled with many voices speaking of Swanson's life, but also with Swanson's voice — in an audio recording of him singing "Jesus Led Me All the Way."

"Music was such a big part of Don's life and this song is a song of testimony for Don," Baker said.

The testimony came in a line of the song that stated, "I will sing while entering heaven's door."

Before he died, Swanson

picked out the two hymns he wanted sung at his funeral. The congregation honored his request Monday by singing, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and "Crown Him with Many Crowns."

Born in Grand Rapids, Mich., Swanson began his work in the church as an organist and choir director at Wheaton College. From there he joined the Army and was chosen to be one of 50 members of the Army's chorus, stationed in Washington, D.C. He met and married his wife, Joann Hanson, during his military tenure.

After being discharged from the Army, Swanson became the music minister and associate pastor at a church in Washington, D.C., before moving to Lancaster, Calif., where he was music minister at Lancaster Baptist Church.

After moving from church to church along the Pacific coastline for several years, Swanson finally made his home in Sun City in 1994, and continued his ministering at Bellevue Heights Church.

Swanson was a member of the church's choir and was active in bereavement counseling.

Community members who spoke of his life Monday remembered him for his love and caring for the congregation.

"He was a good friend," the Rev. Cheryl Adair said. "He was a friend, a spiritual leader and a confidant. There are so many things that I will miss about him."

Memorials in honor of Swanson will be used to begin a fund to purchase a harp for the Sun Health Hospice of Sun City. Contributions may be made through Bellevue Heights Church, 9440 W. Hutton Drive, Sun City.