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In this issue:

- **Field of candidates running for SBC posts**
- **Texas woman finds mission at Texas motor speedway**
- **Texas Baptist puppet builder gears gospel to youngsters**

Field of candidates running for SBC posts

DALLAS (ABP) -- A field of candidates for Southern Baptist Convention offices has taken shape prior to the June 17-19 SBC annual meeting in Dallas. As of June 12, they included:

-- President. Current President Tom Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., is not expected to be opposed for a traditional second one-year term at the SBC helm. He will be nominated by Ralph Smith, retired pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

-- First vice president. Dennis Hansen, director of missions for Bay Lakes Baptist Association in northeastern Wisconsin, will be nominated by Tim Shrader, pastor of Celebration Fellowship Baptist Church in Oshkosh, Wis. Miles Seaborn, pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, will be nominated by Stan Coffey, pastor of San Jacinto Baptist Church in Amarillo, Texas.

-- Second vice president. David Galvan, pastor of Primera Iglesia Nueva Vida in Garland, Texas, will be nominated by Rudy Hernandez, an evangelist from Grand Prairie, Texas. J.C. Mitchell, a retired Florida pastor, will be nominated by Steve Cloud of Columbia, S.C. Bill Wagner, professor of evangelism and missions at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., will be nominated by Cal Guy, professor emeritus at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

-- Recording secretary. John Yeats, editor of the Indiana Baptist newspaper, will be nominated by Gary Miller, pastor of Sagamore Hill Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

-- Registration secretary. Lee Porter of Atlanta, longtime holder of the office, is expected to be renominated.

-30-

-- By Marv Knox

Texas woman finds mission at Texas motor speedway

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- When Kathy Stone saw construction beginning on the Texas Motor Speedway north of Fort Worth, she heard the Lord say to her, "I want a presence there." She wasn't sure she was hearing correctly.

Stone is no stranger to racing. She was in racing promotion for 20 years and was a car owner on the off-road racing circuit. She knows what goes on around racing.

"I said, 'Lord, have you ever been to a race?'" The races draw just plain, ordinary folks to the carnival-like atmosphere of a race weekend, but many hard-core race fans who can quote you lap times and last year's winners on the NASCAR circuit, and some of the newer ones can be on the rowdy side. It's party time. Stone had seen them.

"The Lord told me, 'I'll take care of the speedway folks; your problem is the Christians,'" Stone said. Bringing a Christian witness to an event that will draw 200,000 spectators is a daunting challenge.

Stone and her husband, Chuck, are members of First Baptist Church in Rhome, Texas, near the speedway built by North Carolina's Bruton Smith. After she first felt the impression of what God wanted her to do, she prayed for three weeks about how to respond.

"I would cry every time I would drive down 114 (the speedway is at the intersection of Highway 114 and I-35). It got to the point where I would go another way" it became such a burden, she said.

She was already involved in literacy ministries. She and her husband are their church's church-and community-ministers and teach literacy classes among Hispanics. Both are Mission Service Corps consultants for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

As MSC consultants, they receive PrayerGrams from the board in Alpharetta, Ga. One day as she was struggling with how to follow through at the speedway, she received a PrayerGram that mentioned a need to pray for Frank Starke, who is involved in ministries at 16 of the 18 NASCAR tracks. She called him.

"It was amazing; God's hand was in it," she said.

Starke came to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and he and Stone met with representatives of Tarrant, Denton and Wise Baptist associations and the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

They formed a 16-person task force and named the effort Texas Alliance Raceway Ministries (TxARM). Stone is co-coordinator, along with Bobby Cox of Tarrant Association and Susan Edwards of Denton Association. All three associations and the Texas convention have helped with funding.

For a year and a half, Stone and the others made plans as to how to present a Christian witness at the new racing complex. The logo of TxARM is an outline map of Texas overlaid with a cross and encircled by a speedway and a race car.

Finally, they sent their proposal to the speedway offices, not knowing what to expect but remembering the Lord had said, "Don't worry about the speedway folks."

When Eddie Gossage, the speedway director, came to a meeting of the task force, he gave a Christian testimony. He leads a Bible study for the speedway employees, Stone said. He recently invited her to a meeting to explain what she and TxARM are doing. "The Lord used it to let me witness," she said.

Gossage and the speedway have given TxARM more than a welcome. They provide a tent to house Christian concerts and preaching services on Sunday mornings, mention the ministry in the schedule of events, announce ministry events on the public address system and provide tickets and passes so volunteers have access to the vast area.

"They have given us an open door," Stone said. "Mr. Gossage has said anything we need is ours."

Ministry is carried on in three areas. Christian concerts are held almost continuously in the tent. A "carnival" is held for children; and a bicycle brigade of volunteers circulates around the complex, offering encouragement and a Christian witness to employees and people in the parking lots and campground.

The bike riders and other volunteers distribute schedules of events with a plan of Christian salvation printed on the back of the schedule.

"Everyone wants a schedule of events," Stone said. "When they get one from us, they get something extra."

At the inaugural NASCAR race in April, Interstate Batteries, which sponsored the event, gave TxARM 100,000 copies of Sports Spectrum to distribute among the fans. The magazine contains Christian testimonies of several of racing's top drivers and car owners. The speedway will provide water for distribution at the next event.

"We'll pass it out along with living water," Stone said.

The ministry needs volunteers. About 80, most of them from Tarrant, Denton and Wise associations, helped at the last event. Hundreds could be utilized in the campground, parking area and in the stands.

"I feel the biggest evangelistic effort needs to be in the campgrounds," Stone said.

"There are 32 NASCAR races during the year, and many of these people will be at all or most of them. They don't have time to go to church. We need Christians with campers to camp and witness to them."

The effectiveness of the ministry is hard to measure. Many people drift into the tent to hear Christian music and testimonies and move on; others read the plan of salvation on the schedules or hear the witness of a volunteer without any sign of acceptance.

Seven professions of faith in Christ and one reconciled marriage were recorded at the first race in April.

Stone is leaving the results to the Lord. After all, he told her he would take care of the speedway folks.

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Texas Baptist puppet builder gears gospel to youngsters

By Marv Knox

DESOTO, Texas (ABP) -- Bill Hawes has had a hand in putting a new face on Christianity.

Actually, his hands have been in hundreds of faces -- some of them green, others blue and even orange.

Hawes makes puppets. And for almost three decades, he's been using them to tell girls and boys about Christ's love.

Those puppets sang their way to center stage for Crossover Dallas, June 14. The massive outreach campaign -- held in the host city prior to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting each year -- will involve 250 Dallas-area churches and volunteers from across the nation.

Hawes' company, Puppet Productions, and its ministry arm, Children's Outreach Network, have been big contributors to the effectiveness of Crossover Dallas, reported Jana Young, an associate director of missions for Dallas Baptist Association and a key organizer of the event.

They supplied puppets at significant discounts and provided free training, which enabled many churches that might not have been able to afford puppets to participate, Young said.

For Hawes, that's all part of ministry.

"People think we're in the puppet business, but we really aren't," he explained. "We're in a ministry of outreach and teaching. Puppets are a part of it, because children respond to puppets.

"One reason we work with kids is because that's how we also reach their parents--how we reach the whole family."

Hawes first stuck his hands in puppetry in the late '60s, when he was minister of music and education at First Baptist Church in Lemon Grove, Calif.

His idea then was to provide kids who didn't want to be in the youth choir with an opportunity to minister. The response of other congregations was so great he resigned from his church in 1971, and he's been producing puppets and creative ministry supplies ever since. The operation moved to Texas in 1990, and the Hawes family are members of the Fellowship of Los Colinas in Irving, Texas.

Puppet ministry provides a double impact, Hawes said. Of course, it appeals to children and offers an avenue for reaching unchurched families. But it also provides a place of ministry for children and youth.

"Puppets give teens a ministry," he noted. "At an early age, they can receive training in leadership, understand the importance of volunteering in the community and learn evangelism techniques.

"When kids feel needed, they'll respond. We need to train students to be peer leaders. They have something valuable to contribute, not only in our churches, but also in our communities."

The experience gained by volunteers from area and out-of-town churches in Crossover Dallas could provide the springboard for ongoing ministry to poor children and families who need it most, Hawes said. He added he hopes the contacts made will lead to long-term "kids' clubs" ministries near the churches.

"There really needs to be a kids' club in every major apartment complex and government housing complex," he said.

To that end, Hawes' organization trains 3,000 churches and 10,000 volunteers a year.

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