

Couple turns milestone into opportunity

Dover pair starts DSU scholarship on 50th wedding anniversary

By Maggie MacNeill
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DOVER — Late last month, St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church in Dover was where several hundred people gathered to participate in the dual celebration of William J. and the Rev. Shirley M. Smith’s 50 years of marriage and the official launching of their namesake scholarship fund designated for Delaware State University second-year students estimated at more than \$16,000 and growing.

Together the couple built a small business empire that has contributed to Kent County’s economic development, employing up to 35 workers over the course of Smith Masonry Inc.’s 49-year history.

Mr. Smith, a former migrant worker from North Carolina, came to Delaware at age 9 with his crew boss father, picking potatoes, beans and tomatoes.

Working on farms 15 to 17 hours a day until he’d reached the age of 16, he’d learned the value of hard work.

He met and soon married the former Shirley M. Taylor in 1960. With little skills, but great faith he started his own business in 1961 after being denied a 25-cent raise by his employer because he would earn the same amount as his white co-workers.

Mr. Smith quickly discovered that being a hard worker was not enough for the demands and skill sets required for his new undertaking as a building contractor and after hours of studying his first-floor plan, he became completely overwhelmed and confused.

According to Mr. Smith, that while sleeping, he was taught by God to read the plan and when he awoke he had the clarity, understanding and peace to enable him to move forward.

Move forward he did and the rest, as they say, is history.

In the own words of the Rev. Smith, pastor of Mt. Friendship A.M.E. Church in Smyrna, about her half-century of wedded bliss and devotion to her beloved husband and her “calling” to the ministry, she wrote:

“Marriage consists of compromise, commitment, communication, love, forgiveness and being patient with each other. When William asked me to marry him, I knew the seriousness of what it meant to be married. I knew it meant spending a lifetime with him — until death. I was ready. I was excited.

“I was in love. I knew I wanted to be



Submitted photo/S. Reene Smi

William J. and the Rev. Shirley M. Smith were recently honored at St. Andrew’s Lutheran Church in Dover in recognition of their 50 years of marriage and the official launching of their namesake scholarship fund designated for Delaware State University students. The Rev. Smith is the pastor of Mt. Friendship A.M.E. Church in Smyrna.

committed to the vows I took before God and man — through good and bad times. I realized that over time, life brings all of us challenges. I thank God for these 50 years as I reflect on our marriage. I realize how blessed I am to be married to the right person for me.

“And, how blessed and happy I am to be married to the man I am still in love with. I am blessed and happy that I still respect this wonderful man. I thank God for ordaining marriage, it makes life complete for me.

“God is the leading and spiritual guide in my life and our marriage. I say, ‘To God Be the Glory.’”

These proud parents of five grown children, grandparents of six and great-grandparents of three know a thing or two about how to raise a family as well as a roof.

Anyone wishing to make a tax-deductible donation to the William J. & Reverend Shirley M. Smith, Sr. Scholarship Fund may send checks payable to the Del. Community Foundation, P.O. Box 177, Dover, DE 19903 or visit www.thesmithlegacy.org.

Editor’s note: Maggie MacNeill is a freelance writer living in Dover

Pastor working to help less fortunate in Smyrna community

One thing anyone who attends Sunday services at Smyrna’s Mt. Friendship A.M.E. Church is sure to notice is the “joyful noise” its eight-person gospel choir and stand-out keyboard player/tenor lead singer, Joseph Glascoe, make, combined with the full, exuberant participation of its congregation.

From the moment the choir, decked-out in purple vestments, and its pastor, the charismatic Rev. Shirley M. Smith, begin their procession to take their places at the front of the church, all join in the soulful celebration of love and praise.

The historically black church, nestled in the rural western outskirts of town, dates back to 1886.

After a three-year leave of absence from Byrd’s A.M.E. Church in Clayton in 2005, where the itinerant pastor is credit-

ed with doubling membership and vastly increasing Byrd’s financial resources, the Rev. Smith returned to pastoring in 2007 at Mt. Friendship.

There she focuses on the impact of the economic downturn on individuals and families within her flock, along with the church’s ongoing renovation needs.

Most importantly, the inspirational message the Rev. Smith strives to impart to the faithful is an anti-materialistic, get-back-to-basics one.

“Get over your faults and try to make the world a better place. Take more time to spend with your children and show them love when they’re down and out,” she said.

“Be compassionate while being your brother’s keeper”

— Maggie MacNeill