

LOCAL NEWS

Judge Stringer, Hobson City pastor and former mayor, dies at 66

By Joan Garrett
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A tree behind New Hope Missionary Baptist Church was smoking from fire when the Rev. Judge Stringer stormed through the back door to see 15 boys, including his son, watching the blaze.

Eric Stringer, a boy at the time, saw that his father was furious. Rev. Stringer loved the church that he built and pastored, his son recalled Thursday.

In fear, no one answered when his father asked who started the fire. So he lined up the whole group.

"He said, 'I'll get the right one. I'll whip all of you,'" Eric Stringer said, smiling at the memory. "Some of them ran, but he whipped about 12 of us."

Rev. Judge Stringer, the pastor of New Hope for 41 years and former two-term mayor of Hobson City, died Wednesday at his home, a small brick house beside the church. He was 66.

Born in Haleburg in 1940, Rev. Stringer became a pastor at an early age. He and his wife, Vondell, married 48 years ago, when he was 18. A year later, he became the pastor of his first church, the first of four churches he would direct before he arrived in Hobson City in 1965.

"He was a warrior," Vondell Stringer said. "He came here with a mind to get stuff changed."

Rev. Stringer was first elected mayor in 1972. During his time in office he was influential in the building of the first City Hall and with hiring a city planner, said Hobson City Mayor Ralph Woods, a New Hope member for 20 years.

"He had a great rapport with about anyone he met, even as mayor," he said.

As leader of New Hope, Rev. Stringer oversaw the construction of a new church building with classrooms and office space, and church membership increased significantly. He served as president of the Snow Creek District, an association of Baptist churches, and was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Council's local chapter, Vondell Stringer said.

"He spent his life trying to better things for everybody," his daughter, Regina Hamilton, said.



Judge Stringer, pastor at New Hope for 41 years and former two-time Hobson City mayor, died Wednesday at his home. Photo: Special to The Star

“He wanted to instill self-love and self-motivation and develop the community at large.”

Hamilton said she remembers early Sunday mornings, enjoying eggs and bacon and listening to her father on the telephone with area pastors who were seeking help with their sermons.

They would ask about delivery and the location of certain biblical passages, and he always took the time to talk with them, she said.

“He was a Bible scholar,” Hamilton said. “He was eloquent and well-versed. People would just sit around him to hear him talk.”

Pastors respected him, Vondell Stringer said. He was debonair — he owned hundreds of matching handkerchief and tie sets — and his house was never empty.

Raymond Knox was married by Rev. Stringer and is a deacon at New Hope. He said Stringer’s sermons could shake a person to his very core.

“Sometimes he would preach and you would think he was talking directly about you,” Knox said. “He was going to tell it like it was whether you liked it or not. But he would always say, ‘When I am preaching to you I am preaching to myself.’”

Rev. Stringer is survived by his wife, Vondell Knight Stringer; four children, Eric Wayne Stringer, Labonda Michelle Aaron, Regina Stringer Hamilton and Judge L. Stringer III; and 10 grandchildren, Eric Stringer Jr., Mikyia Aaron, Kristen Stringer, Micah Briana Aaron, Michael Aaron, Johnathan Stringer, Judge Stringer IV, Jessica Stringer, Carlton Hamilton III and Kennedi Hamilton.

A memorial service will be at noon Wednesday at 17th Street Baptist Church in Anniston. A family visitation and viewing will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at New Hope.