

Rebecca C. "Becky" Farmer

close-up

Her responsibilities with Isle of Wight Christian Outreach program over the past 22 years have been pretty much everything, from soup to nuts.

INTERVIEW BY SHIRLEY BRINKLEY | CORRESPONDENT

REBECCA C. "BECKY" Farmer wasn't on hand for this year's "Souper Saturday" for the first time in 22 years.

Farmer was chairman of this year's event as she has been for 10 years. She debated whether to attend her 50th class reunion at Ferrum College or the charity event at the Trinity United Methodist Church in Smithfield.

"Everything for Souper Saturday had been planned and everyone knew what to do," Farmer said. "My son and daughter took more of a role this year and everything was fine. The community involvement is just amazing."

The event, sponsored by the Isle of Wight Christian Outreach Program, raised \$10,000. What little soup was left over was stored in containers and frozen. It will be delivered to the needy throughout the year.

"Every county should have an outreach program," said Farmer, who has held every office with the group with the exception of treasurer. "There are volunteers who have worked for many years, and they are there because they want to be."

Several churches in the area began the program 23 years ago, because they recognized there was a need in the county, Farmer said. She is a member of Bethany United Methodist Church in Smithfield, which joined the program a year later. The outreach to the needy has grown to include 44 churches and 10 different programs.

The largest is the food program, which receives grants and donations from churches, food markets, organizations and schools. Church teams pick up the supplies and store them in a food pantry on Va. Route 10. Many se-



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niors have no transportation, and the teams make 400 deliveries every month.

"We have a dental program," Farmer said. "Many seniors haven't been able to afford a dentist, and most need dentures. There is also an emergency assistance program and a home furnishings program."

Other projects include a transportation program for doctors' visits, an automobile program for

minor repairs, and an angel tree for seniors at Christmas.

"I help deliver the angel tree gifts to seniors and the disabled. And we also deliver gifts to children who live in the home with their grandparents. Our clients seem to appreciate the visits as much as they appreciate the gifts."

In the first home repair program, Farmer and others tore out a senior's kitchen floor, hallway

and bathroom. Nervously surveying what they had done, she was concerned the work wouldn't be finished by the end of the day. There were enough volunteer workers though, and the project was done on time.

Co-chairman of missions at her church, Farmer travels with a group to the Henderson Settlement in Frakes, Ky., every year. Sponsored by the United Methodist Church, the settlement has a food pantry, thrift store and programs for needy children and adults.

"We rent a big truck, wrap gifts, and take them to the settlement," she said. "We also ask for a Santa Claus list for those living at the Riverside Convalescent Center and Magnolia Manor in Smithfield. Every year, we have a Christmas party and distribute the gifts."

Born in Smithfield, Farmer grew up with an older brother on the family farm in Isle of Wight. After finishing Smithfield High School in 1960, she graduated from Ferrum, a two-year college near Roanoke, in 1962, where she met her future husband, O.J. "Pete" Farmer.

The couple's daughter, DeNay Smith, teaches at Westside Elementary School, and their son, Lawson W. Farmer, is the Commonwealth's Attorney for Isle of Wight County.

Farmer was a secretary for the central office of the Isle of Wight County School System for 13 years and later, for Smithfield High School for another 13 years. Since her retirement in 2002, she and her husband have enjoyed traveling.

Shirley Brinkley,
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bio

Full name: Rebecca Carr Farmer

Neighborhood: Mill Swamp Road

Hometown: Smithfield

Age: 70

Marital status: Married for 50 years

Children: a girl and a boy

Education: Associate degree, Ferrum College

Community service: Isle of Wight Christian Outreach Program

Hobbies: Reading and volunteering

What has been one of the most rewarding experiences of your life?

My marriage and watching our children grow into wonderful adults.

What has been the most challenging?

My marriage and raising our children (It takes work to have a good marriage and be good parents.)

Describe a snapshot of a perfect day:

Any day spent with my husband, children and grandchildren

Childhood ambition: Just to grow up and make my parents proud of me

Who would play you in a movie based on your life? I have no idea. Perhaps Meryl Streep

Pets: dog, cat, rabbit and two goats

Favorite movie: "Sound of Music"

The books on your nightstand: Bible and my journal

Pet peeve: Whining (Just ask my children - whining got you nowhere!)

Favorite song: I have many - My favorite hymn is "Amazing Grace." Anything by Elvis

If I won \$10M, I would: Be much richer than I am now! I would certainly help my church, my children and my grandchildren.

Favorite night on the town: Relaxing meal at a nice restaurant and perhaps a good movie

What is your most valuable material possession? A ruby ring my father had made especially for my mother in 1937.

Motto: It's easier to smile than to frown

First words of advice you have ever received, and from whom: From my mother and father - Remember a good name is the most important thing you will ever have.