

Religion

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'Godfather of Gospel' bids farewell to off-air duties

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Community News Editor

The "Godfather" has gotten an offer so good he couldn't refuse it: retirement.

Al "The Godfather of Gospel Music" Martin has announced his retirement as operations manager of radio station WSMX. But, he promises, he's not ready to retire from the radio business. In fact, he said, he couldn't even if he wanted to.

"I think it's in my blood. I love radio and I love music," said Mr. Martin, who began his radio broadcasting career in 1966. "I didn't retire from radio. I retired from my position as operations manager, but I'll still be on the air for my shift. Since I was a kid, I've

"If my voice fails, I'll do a final show," he said. "But as long as I have my voice, and as long as someone will allow me on the air, I'll stay in radio."

-- Al Martin

liked being a dee jay."

Mr. Martin said that his ambitions of soaring to the top of the radio industry were stymied by Afro-Americans' exclusion from the airwaves. A graduate of Atkins High School, he attended Russell Commercial School and graduated with a special honor from New York's School of Announcing and Speech. His radio career began in Huntersville, Ala., and he decided to return to Winston-Salem in September of that same year. His first job in local radio was at WAAA, where he worked until 1974.

"Back when I started, there was no chance for blacks to get on the radio except as Amos and Andy,

and they weren't even really black," he said. "Because of that, I got my start in radio late. I was 39 when I started in radio."

Mr. Martin said he chose to pursue a career in gospel music announcing as opposed to other music because he loves the music form. Being a gospel announcer, he said, also increased his longevity in the field because gospel announcers tend to last longer in the business.

"After you get a certain age, you won't last long in radio," said the 62-year-old Mr. Martin. "I felt the best way for me to stay in would be to go into gospel."

Mr. Martin left WAAA and

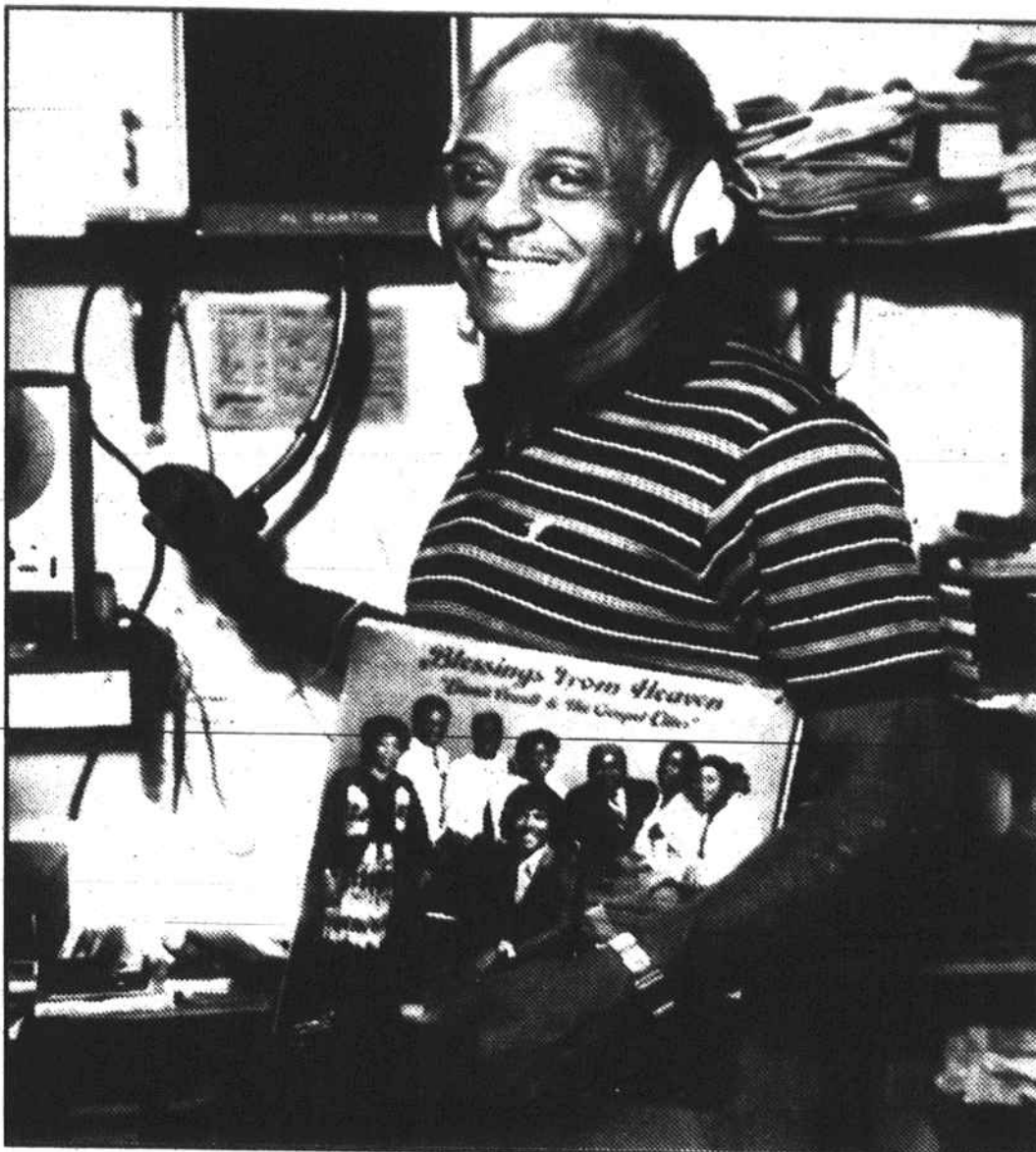


photo by Mike Cunningham

Al "Godfather of Gospel Music" Martin has announced his retirement as operations manager at radio station WSMX. But the radio personality says he will continue to do a shift of music at the station.

headed for Greensboro's WEAL but returned to WAAA in 1974. He became gospel director and announcer at WAIR and joined the staff of WSMX as announcer, religious director, music director and station coordinator in 1982. It was during that time that he was given the tag, "Godfather of Gospel."

The last time I was at WSMX, Jay Springs, who was working at the station, said that I had been in radio so long that I was a godfather and the name just stuck," he said. "I'm very proud of the things

I've accomplished, but I think I'm proudest about the fact that I've been able to help other people along the way."

In 1986, Mr. Martin was a gospel announcer at WTNC in Thomasville but returned to WSMX to assume a position as operations manager.

Mr. Martin said that his role as a gospel announcer allows him to bring inspiration to his audience through the choice of music he plays.

"I get satisfaction from the fact that I can bring inspiration to my audience," he said. "An announcer can bring inspiration to so many people with music. All dee jays work differently, but I've never pulled (outlined ahead of time) a show. I never pick a show. I do it at random according to what the mood is. Radio announcers are not born, they are made."

Mr. Martin said that the recent trend in gospel music has been toward a more contemporary, upbeat form of gospel, but he has chosen to stay true to the traditional style of gospel music. Still, he said, he understands the appeal the new forms have to younger audiences.

"In recent years, contemporary music has come along. It's geared to young people," he said. "You're never going to be able to satisfy all styles so you just have to try to reach a happy medium. I favor the more traditional gospel music. But ultimately, it's not the music, it's the message."

The community honored Mr. Martin with a retirement banquet last weekend at a downtown hotel. But Mr. Martin said that it will be a while yet before he completely disappears from the airwaves.

"If my voice fails, I'll do a final show," he said. "But as long as I have my voice, and as long as someone will allow me on the air, I'll stay in radio."

'Dedication Sunday' at Mount Zion Baptist to feature premiere of \$1.8 million facility

On Sunday, June 25, Mount Zion Baptist Church will hold "Dedication Sunday," to dedicate the Goodwin-File Enrichment Center, the church's new multi-purpose addition to the church.

Dr. K.O.P. Goodwin, the church's pastor emeritus, will provide the morning message and preside over the dedication.

The special occasion is part of the monthlong centennial celebration at Mount Zion.

Life for Mount Zion began in the late 19th century in the hearts of a group of vocalists from Virginia. Under the leadership of the Rev. G.W. Holland, the group of singers organized Mount Zion. Shortly after its organization, the Rev. G.W. Johnson became the church's pastor. He served as pastor for 19 years.

The congregation worshiped at the original site on Third Street until it was destroyed by fire in 1904. Following the fire, the congregation worshiped at various places until Easter Sunday 1907. At that time, the church was able to hold services at its new facility on

Ninth Street. Rev. Johnson died the following year. At that time, the church had 110 members in its congregation.

In 1909, the Rev. R.L. File accepted the call as the church's second pastor. By 1914, the church had increased its membership significantly and a move to another building became necessary. The congregation relocated to Ninth and Maple streets, where Maggie L. Palmer laid the first brick in 1916.

Rev. Goodwin became Mount Zion's pastor in 1946. A native of Washington, D.C., he received his bachelor's degree from Howard University and his master of divinity degree from Shaw University. Under his leadership, Mount Zion expanded its membership and enlarged its internal structure and joined the National Baptist Convention.

In 1963, urban renewal forced yet another move for the Mount Zion congregation. A tract of land was purchased at Eighth Street and Claremont Avenue and construction began in 1968. During its six years of displacement, worship services were held at the Patterson Avenue YMCA, Clark S. Brown

and Sons Funeral Home, First Baptist Church and at Grace Presbyterian Church.

In 1969, the ribbon was cut at the present site and worship services were held in the new building.

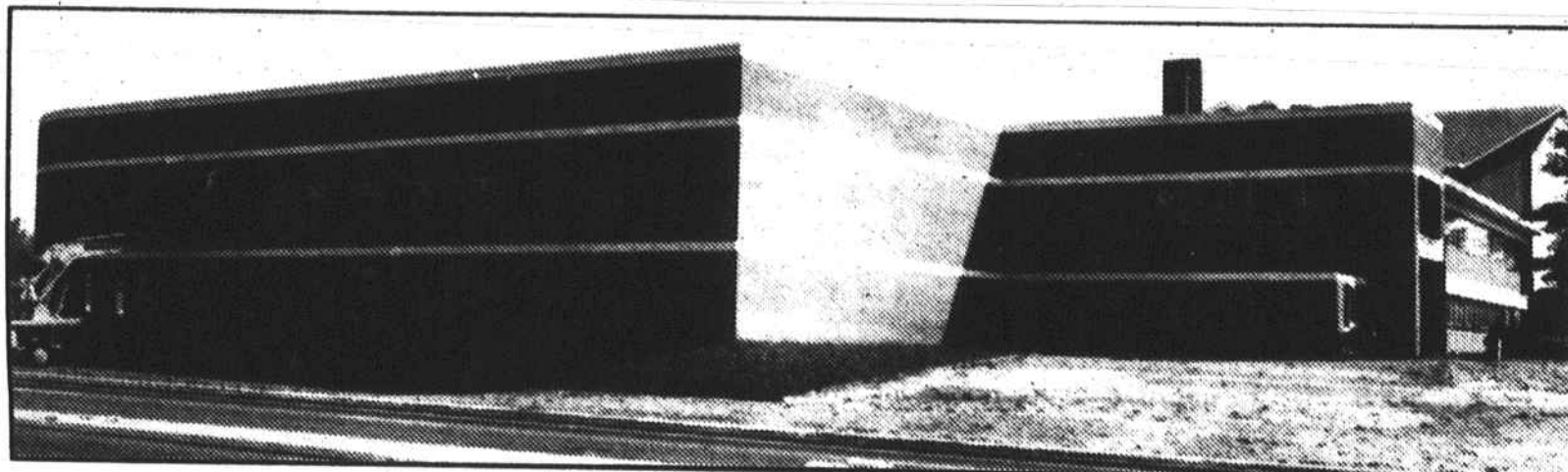
Dr. Goodwin retired in 1977 after 31 years of service.

In 1979, the Rev. Gilbert G. Campbell Jr. was called as fourth pastor of the church. He served as pastor for three years and was succeeded by the church's current pastor, Dr. Serenus T. Churn Sr., a native of Camden, N.J.

Dr. Churn, who is celebrating his fifth anniversary during the centennial, has a bachelor's degree from Morgan State and a master of divinity degree from Howard University. He received his doctorate from Drew University.

During his tenure at Mount Zion, the church has experienced an increase in membership and has established several new church organizations and services.

The first phase of the Centennial Fund Project, the Goodwin-File Life Enrichment Center, was com-



Finishing Touches

Mount Zion Baptist Church will continue its centennial celebration June 25 with "Dedication Sunday." The highlight of the program will be the dedication of the \$1.8 million multi-purpose addition to the church, the File-Goodwin Enrichment Center. The dedication will be held at 1 p.m. with Dr. K.O.P. Goodwin, the church's pastor emeritus, presiding. At right, workers finish up their last tasks to prepare the building for its debut.

photos by Mike Cunningham



pleted under Dr. Churn's leadership. Dedication services for the new \$1.8 million center will be held at 1

p.m. The center includes a library, classrooms, lounges and a 400-seat

banquet hall. It also will be used for adult and youth day care programs.

CHURCH CALENDAR

SATURDAY, JUNE 24

• The C.C. Turner Inspirational Mass Choir of Calvary Hill will celebrate its eighth anniversary through June 25. The program June 24 will be held at 7 p.m. and the June 25 program will be held at 4 p.m. The church is located at 2411 Urban St. Elder Claude C. Turner is the host pastor.

• The Winston-Salem Day Chapter of Women's Aglow Fellowship International will hold an interdenominational meeting at 9:30 a.m. at the Central YMCA. The guest will be from the Living Water's Ministry in Lincolnton. For more information call 723-0869.

SUNDAY, JUNE 25

• Pitt's Memorial Baptist Church's Missionary Department will present "The Seven Seals" from the Book of Revelations at 6 p.m. at 2000 Wilbur St. Various ministers will participate. Dr. Bracy Bonham is host pastor.

• The L.S. Tate Gospel Choir will celebrate its 8th anniversary at 4 p.m. Dr. Lawrence S. Tate is host pastor. For more information call 784-7699.

• First Calvary Baptist Church, 401 N. Woodland Ave., will celebrate the 52nd anniversary of its Vocal Choir at 2:30 p.m.

• John Wesley AME Zion Church will observe its annual homecoming day beginning with the 11 a.m. service. The Rev. McConnell of Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church, will be the special guest speaker. He will be

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United Church of Christ opposes FCC lottery for license applications

Special to the Chronicle

A proposed lottery for awarding new radio and TV licenses will create a "sweepstakes atmosphere" for "sham" operators to acquire a piece of a scarce public commodity, claims the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ

in comments filed in Washington, D.C., with the Federal Communications Commission.

Responding to a rule-making change proposed by the FCC to replace the current system of comparative hearings with a lottery, the church agency charges that such a plan will not favor the most quali-

fied applicants.

Under the FCC proposal, says Andrew Blau, spokesperson for the church communications office, comparative hearings, which are meant to determine how competing licensees propose to serve the community, would be eliminated.

"We have always fought for the

most qualified applicant to serve a community," Mr. Blau asserts, "and we're not about to see merit replaced by numbered ping pong balls."

Another change that disturbs the church office centers on the treatment of license applications from minorities and women.

Vacation Study

Keir Pettegrew discusses a Bible lesson with his teacher, Delores Miller, during a St. John CME Church Vacation Bible School session earlier this week. Looking on is Andrea Davis. Members of Mrs. Miller's class are 2- and 3-year-old children. The Vacation Bible School at the church will run through Friday.

photo by Mike Cunningham