

# History

From A1

in preserving history for future generations."

Smith decided two months ago that he wanted others to enjoy some of the things he'd collected during his time at Bertie.

"I decided that it didn't need to be in this office, because no one would ever see it," said Smith, who currently lives in Buies Creek and has been the color commentator for the Campbell University men's basketball team for the past six years. "Even if only one person sees it, that's enough."

Smith always visits Bunn's Barbecue when he returns to Windsor for visits with family and friends. He was in town last week and visited the Windsor eatery.

"I had lunch and spoke with Russ (Russell), and he told me about wanting to open a museum in town," Smith said. "I said that would be a perfect place and I would trust him with this stuff."

Smith's first basketball team at Bertie won 24 games.

"I started collecting all the pictures I could. I kept everything," he said.

The second year the Falcons went 26-4 and finished third in the state.

In the summer of 1968, Bertie - which was mostly white - integrated with the town's all-black schools, Southwestern and C.G. White.

"The world was in turmoil then," Smith said. "These kids came in and started winning basketball games, and that kind of solidified the county."

Bertie moved to the 3A classification in 1969-70, the year after integration.

"We were growing so fast," Smith noted. "The black kids didn't know what to expect (that first year) other than their schools were closing and they were coming to Bertie. We didn't change the school colors or anything."

The 1969-70 season will forever be remembered in the annals of Falcon athletics.

They beat rival Washington three times on their way to the district



Coach Jerry Smith (center) returns with the State Championship trophy. He is joined by the late Ron Cooke (left) and Bing Mitchell.

tournament, then beat Whiteville and Reidsville to advance to the state championship game against undefeated Pinecrest.

"This was back when you had to win the district tournament to advance to the state tournament, and there weren't as many teams," he said. "Not like now, where almost everyone gets to go."

One of the items in his collection is a letter from the Bertie County Schools Superintendent saying that school would close early so everyone could attend the state finals in Durham.

Some of the other items Smith is donating include a handmade scrapbook of photographs from his 10-year tenure as basketball coach (with help from yearbook photographers and others); a DVD containing the state title game as well as the 35th year reunion of the 1970 state champions in 2005; a box containing two years of practice schedules, and the 2005 reunion program, as well as several other photos and letters not in the scrapbook.

The DVD was culled from old reel-to-reel tapes.

"I am not a technology guru," Smith said. "But I found different people to get done what I wanted done."

Smith's fondness for collecting started when he was a coach at Dunn High School prior to arriving at Bertie.

"I started a wall of fame, every team, and it just accumulated," he

said. "The kids loved to see that stuff and it meant so much to them. It just grew and grew and grew."

The 1969-70 Bertie team had players from all over the county, black and white. One who didn't make the team, Thomas Ruffin, told the crowd at the reunion that Smith made a compelling statement shortly after integration.

"He said that I said, 'We're not black, we're not white. We are all blue,'" Smith said.

"We had kids from everywhere in the county - Windsor, Colerain, Lewiston, Aulander," he continued. "The community really gravitated around this basketball team; it really was a community effort."

Smith even had state championship rings created many years later, which were presented to everyone who attended the reunion. A former player bought the rings.

"Everyone got a DVD, a team picture and a ring," he said.

Smith said he learned more about integration from his players than he ever taught them.

"The kids taught me more about integration and dealing with different people than I taught them, by a long shot," he said. "I grew up in Greene County and went to an all-white school (Walstonburg, which later became Greene Central).

"At Bertie, we went from 80 percent white to 80 percent minority by bringing in the other two schools," Smith continued. "It was a

heckuva change, but I treated them all the same and worked the daylights out of them. Of course, winning made it easier."

Smith said the state championship was all about a group working as one.

"It's all about work and trusting each other and playing together as a team. We worked hard at it, and they taught me that you could work through a hard, tough situation just by communicating with people, setting goals and working to reach them. I was not their buddy, I was their coach who respected them and their families, and they respected me."

As the team kept winning, the crowds increased.

"You couldn't get into our gym," he said. "I remember the night we won the state championship...we had a house full of people in Durham. It was amazing the number of cars that drove back to Windsor."

While Smith moved on in 1977, first to Chowan and then to Campbell, and finally, to several high schools as an administrator before retiring in 2004, these memories are still dear to him, and he wanted to share them with the community.

"I have enough pictures and memories to keep me fulfilled," he said. "I thought the people of Bertie County needed to see all of this. They were so behind us; I felt like these things needed to be here."

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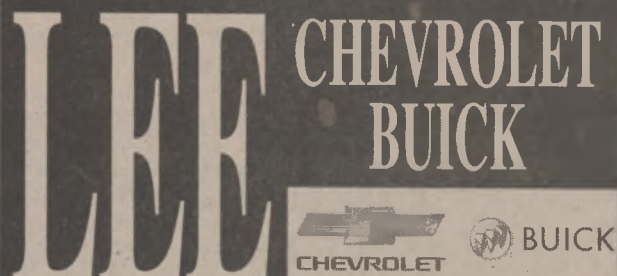


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# Harrell

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State University.

Born and raised in Gates County, Rev. Harrell spent his early years in collegiate education at Shaw University in Raleigh, where he earned a bachelor's degree in Sociology. He continued his education with a master's degree and was awarded an honorary doctorate from New York University.

Rev. Harrell became Pastor of Sandy Branch MBC after a member heard him preach a eulogy, and suggested to other members he be considered.

Under his watch, Sandy Branch went from a single service each month to meeting

weekly. They also added a Male Chorus and began a monthly youth service.

In addition, Sandy Branch constructed a sanctuary and education building during his tenure as pastor.

During a 2015 interview with the Bertie Ledger-Advance, Rev. Harrell admitted he had thought of retiring, but couldn't bear the thought of leaving the people of Sandy Branch.

"They have become like family - almost literally a part of me," he said.

Sandy Branch, Roxobel, Bertie County and eastern North Carolina lost part of its fabric Jan. 9 when Rev. Harrell

passed away at Sentara Obici Hospital.

Rev. Harrell is survived by his wife, Carla C. Harrell; two daughters, Andrea H. Laing and husband Vincent of New York, NY and Gwen Tyler of Patterson, NJ; as well as two Goddaughters, Doretha Marsh of Bronx, NY,

and Alexa Speller of Elizabeth City.

He had six grand children and four great-grandchildren.

He was laid to rest at Lebanon Grove Baptist Church Jan. 12 following a Home-going Service at Sandy Branch Missionary Baptist Church.

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