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Life & Leisure



Cleo Bratcher Jr.

The News-Journal continues its series of feature articles on candidates for local offices.



Sweethearts.... Margaret Bratcher is the most ardent supporter of her husband, Cleo Bratcher Jr., incumbent Democrat county commissioner.



Family comes first for the Bratchers. Shown from left (first row), are grandson Tabias McRae, Margaret Bratcher and husband Cleo Bratcher Jr., grandchildren Nicole Bratcher and Georgio Bratcher, (second row) son Geno Bratcher and daughter Kim Bratcher.

Bratcher aspires to always serve 'the Almighty'

Love of Hoke leads him on fair path

By VICTORIANA SUMMERS
Staff writer

When Incumbent County Commissioner Cleo Bratcher Jr. was growing up on a Hoke farm, he dreamed of owning his own business someday. Occasionally, he dreamed of being elected governor or president of the United States.

Wise beyond his years, Bratcher fulfilled his business goal, currently operating Elwood Barber Shop in Raeford, a business he opened in 1982. A lifelong Democrat, he is also serving his 18th year as a county commissioner — an elected position he aspired to achieve 10 years prior to ever filing for the public office.

"I have struggled in my life and succeeded by working hard and gaining experience from other mentors along the way," Bratcher said. "You cannot succeed without struggle. When there is no struggle, you cannot understand how to feel compassion toward others."

"I have learned to pray a lot, read my Bible and ask for guidance from the Almighty."

Running for county commissioner for another term, Bratcher was appointed last year to serve out the term of the late L.E. McLaughlin Jr., who died after a lingering illness. Bratcher said his sense of "fairness" to

all people and putting "family values" first are strengths in returning to his commissioner's seat.

"If I did not love this county the way I love it, I would never want to serve as a county commissioner," Bratcher said. "In order for this county to grow, you have to love it. I want people to see me as Cleo and not just an image."

"I am a guy who means what I say, and I try to genuinely help people."

Bratcher said he realizes he is known to arbitrate and be somewhat of a "peacemaker" on the board. He thinks unity is important — and love of his fellow commissioners.

"I am not a radical person," Bratcher said. "I am a person that believes in harmony. I think positive results can be achieved by a positive attitude."

"Negativism only causes a whole lot of confusion. Being positive points us in the right direction."

A proponent of higher education, Bratcher, 60, thinks children are the salvation of Hoke County. He serves on the Smart Start Board under the umbrella of Hoke's Partnership for Children.

"We have nice schools established that must meet the challenges ahead," Bratcher said. "We have all the tools. All we have to do is work with those tools for educating our children."

"I am grateful to the (Wyatt and Mary) Upchurches for donating land to make it possible to expand the Sandhills Community College's campus in Hoke."

He urged citizens to help back the board in seeking more industrial growth, providing jobs for Hoke's citizens.

"We have to think long range with our goals to know where we are headed," Bratcher said. "We are in this boat together and if we spring a leak, it is up to all of us to find a solution not to sink."

"We cannot sit on this board and think about ourselves or personal gain. Our commitment is to the people who elected us and to do what is best for this county."

Bratcher's first business in Raeford was the opening of The Shoe Chest on Main Street, which later was transformed into Elwood's Barber Shop. He is a graduate of the Harris Barber College in Raleigh.

Bratcher graduated in 1961 from Upchurch High School. Upon graduation, he was employed as a textile technician for five years at Burlington Mills. He rose in industry, accepting a supervisor position with Knitaway, which is Unilever today. He was employed at Knitaway supervising 80 people for five years.

Bratcher is distinguished as the first minority person in Hoke to be hired as a clerk at the state ABC store, a position he held for almost two years. Bratcher also was hired as the first minority manager at Moore's Department Store in Raeford, a post he held for five years.

"I loved being in the business world," Bratcher said. "I think my management experience is valuable in my role as a county commissioner. I feel like my customers are part of my family."

"I try to learn from people; I listen to the needs of our community. I believe my spiritual background helps me keep my integrity to make careful decisions that may affect our taxpayers."

Bratcher's past and present professional affiliations include membership in: The Hoke Social Services

Board; Juvenile Crime Prevention Council; the Hoke Health Board; the Hoke Mental Health Board; and the Emergency Management Board.

Bratcher is also a charter member of the Hoke County Civic League, where he has been a member for 30 years.

He has received numerous service awards from the Mental Health Board, Health Board and the N.C. Turkey Festival. He is a sponsor of the Booster Club and Project Graduation and donates to many community activities.

Bratcher attends McLaughlin A.M.E. Zion Chapel Church, where he has been a member for over 35 years. He has served as superintendent of Sunday Schools for 30 years. He has also served as chairman of the Board of Trustees for the last 10 years. A former member of the all male choir, Bratcher is chairman of the Budget Committee.

Bratcher is married to Margaret Mack Bratcher, owner of a sewing business. They have three children and eight grandchildren. His parents are the late Cleo Bratcher Sr. and Marie Hollingsworth Bratcher, 80 years old.

"I feel it is very important to maintain family ties," Bratcher said. "There is no way to show love for anybody unless you can show love for your own family."

"Love starts at home. In my spare time, I try to enjoy the company of my mother and grandchildren as much as possible."

Bratcher said he recalled his father saying, "Work hard and always move to the next level."

"I am looking forward to serving on the board of commissioners again," Bratcher said. "A 20-year record would be something I could be very proud of in knowing I served my community to the best of my abilities."



Cleo Bratcher Jr. (back, center) is surrounded by his fellow trustee board and pastor at McLaughlin A.M.E. Zion Chapel Church.



Visiting in Charlotte are grandson Breyon Bratcher, Cleo Bratcher Jr. and wife Margaret Mack Bratcher.