

Hundreds Work Together To Build Kingdom Hall

BY DOUG RUTTER

"Even though you've been to a few, it's absolutely wonderful to have one for your own congregation," an exhausted Gene Smith said as he massaged his aching back, wiped his sweaty brow and marveled at what had been accomplished over the weekend.

After all, approximately 500 Jehovah's Witnesses had used the quick-build concept to turn a slab of cement and rough building frame into a place of worship in just 56 hours.

With quick-build projects, volunteers from all over the country come to a site for an entire weekend to help build a new meeting hall. This past weekend, the site was on U.S. 17 about five miles south of Shallotte.

As Smith put it, "a small army of ants invaded" the area Friday, laying siege to what appeared to be a parking lot with the inkling of a future building.

But when the dust cleared Sunday night, a 4,152-square-foot structure complete with running water, air conditioning, furniture, burglar alarms, a front-yard sprinkler system and lighted exit signs stood ready for use. Jehovah's Witnesses in western Brunswick County had their first Kingdom Hall.

Smith, a resident of Shallotte and chairman of the local committee which organized the project, said materials for the hall cost about \$105,000.

A five-member regional committee provided guidance to the local committee in organizing and executing the quick-build project.

Regional committee member Ken Anderson of Myrtle Beach, S.C., said volunteers have built about a half dozen such halls in this region, which includes most of South Carolina and southeastern North Carolina, within the past year. "We've got quite a number more on the books being planned," he added.

The regional committee coordinates local efforts in its area by scheduling dates for each project and sending out letters requesting the assistance of other Jehovah's Witnesses, he said.

Across the nation, he continued, there have been 300 quick-build kingdom halls raised over the past two years alone. The projects are also carried out in Canada, Mexico and other foreign countries.

Sheldon McQuarters, who does missionary work in Ecuador, was walking around the construction site Friday afternoon, occasionally stopping to take photographs which he plans to show to Jehovah's Witnesses in South America.

Since he had not been to the United States in five years and quick-build projects have just become popular in the last couple of years, the local project was the first he had ever witnessed.

"It's very impressive," he said. "It's tremendous construction speed."

Although quick-build halls cannot be raised in Ecuador because of the climate and lack of skilled personnel, he said congregations there may be able to use some of the principles of the projects, such as unity and togetherness, to build a stronger following.

While McQuarters traveled the far-

thest distance to witness the quick-build project, there were several people from Ohio who took part in the actual construction.

John Coover, for one, came all the way from Wellington, Ohio, to supervise the hanging and finishing of sheetrock.

While he has participated in 13 other quick-build projects, Coover said this was the farthest he has ever traveled to help build a new kingdom hall.

"They needed help, and when we heard they needed help we decided to come down," he said.

Todd Parks of San Leandro, Calif., also traveled a good distance to help out. As he and Mike Stanley of Ocean Isle Beach hung wallpaper in the men's restroom Sunday afternoon, he explained that he scheduled his vacation around the quick-build project.

Many of the volunteers, including Loree Payne and her husband, Patrick, came from South Carolina.

"Everybody likes working together and we trust one another," said Mrs. Payne. "I've grown up with a lot of these people."

As she assisted in the installation of air conditioning ducts Friday afternoon, she talked about the 20 halls she has helped build in the past few years, including two built in one weekend last year in Asheville.

"We're going to be doing one in Beaufort (S.C.) next year," she added. "If we help them now maybe they'll help us."

Like many other workers from out of town, the Paynes camped on the church grounds throughout the weekend. Others rented hotel rooms or simply stayed with a local friend.

In addition to the many visitors, there were also more than a hundred locals involved in the various phases of construction.

Among the county residents participating were Jason Willis of Southport and Joel Reeves of Shallotte. As a light rain fell Friday afternoon, the two young friends continued to pound nails on the partially-completed roof.

"I've done lots of them," said the 13-year-old Willis. "My dad does this all around North and South Carolina."

Despite the rain which fell Friday night and Saturday morning, work never stopped from 7 a.m. Friday until 3 p.m. Sunday, when the first meeting was held in the new building.

A building inspector was also on site at all times to check each phase of construction as it was completed.

Smith said the rain caused about a 12-hour delay in shingling the roof, but added that the volunteers made up for it with harder work.

Besides the weather, the only other minor problem during the weekend occurred when the manufacturer delivered roof trusses of the wrong size. Smith said the supports were adjusted and the problem was corrected in about three hours.

"All things considered, it went real smooth," he said. "We don't have any complaints."

Smith said the final "odds and ends" inside the building should be completed within the next few weeks.

In the meantime, he said he expects a congregation of nearly 130 people to hold all of its meetings in

the new Kingdom Hall. "We expect it to grow real quick," he added. Previously, Brunswick County's

only Kingdom Hall for Jehovah's Witnesses was the one located on Midway Road between Southport and

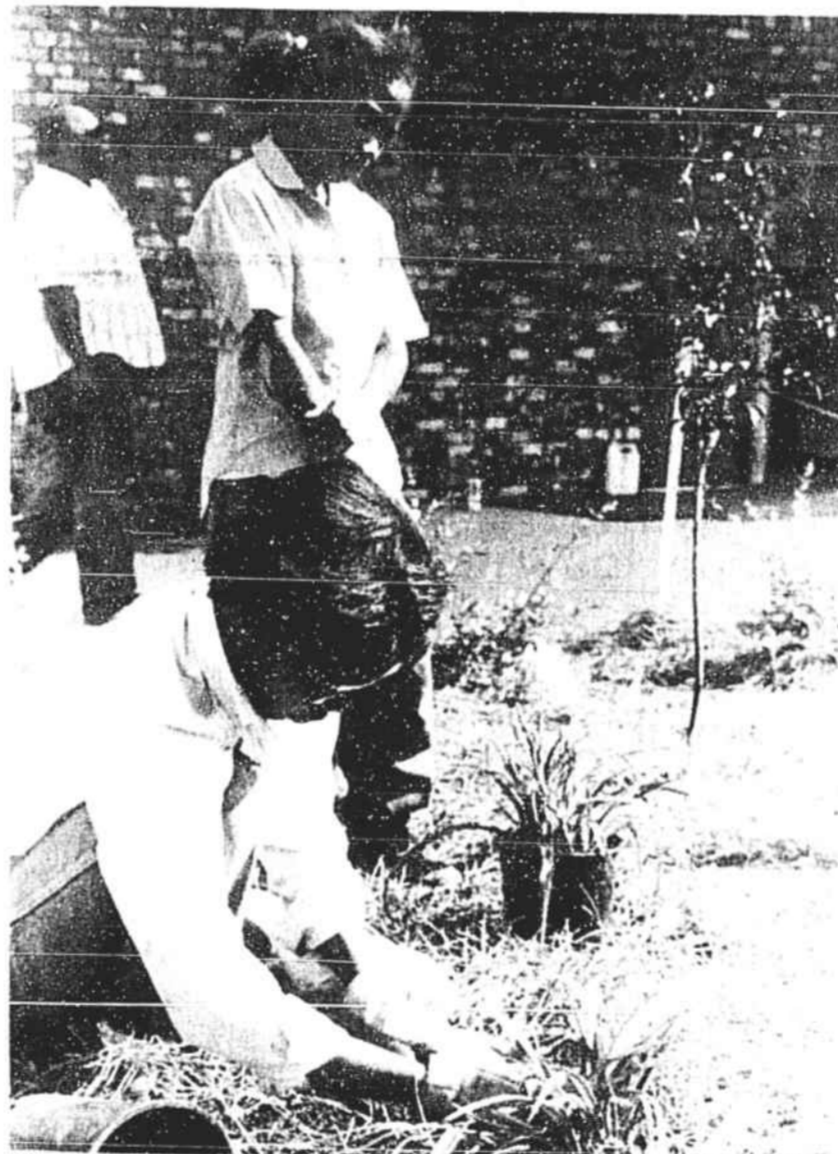
Bolivia. Another quick-build project has been planned for later this year in the Leland area.



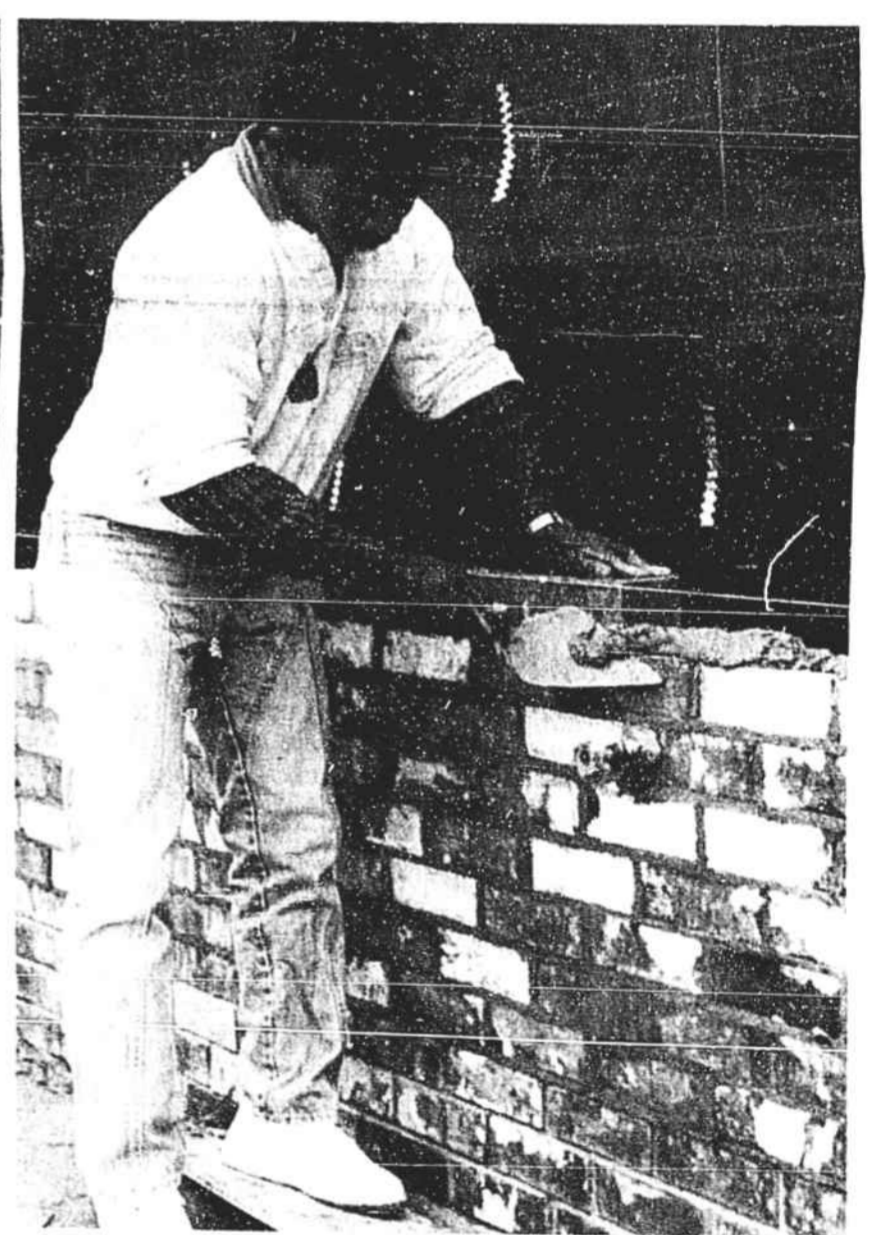
A FEW BAGS of dried cement and scraps of wood were all that remained on the ground when the building was completed about 3 p.m. Sunday. In this

photo, about 400 Jehovah's Witnesses line up outside the structure prior to the first meeting.

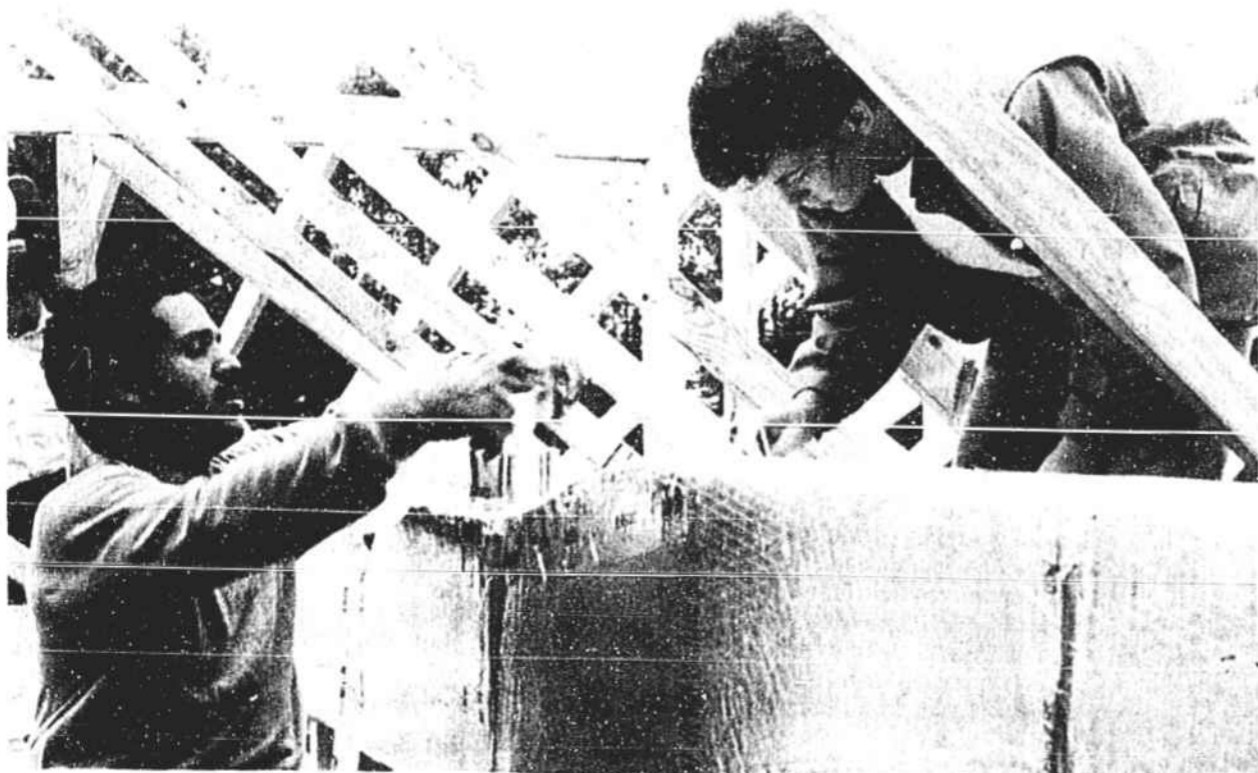
STAFF PHOTOS BY DOUG RUTTER



ANGELA MILLS of Shallotte plants day lilies in front of the new hall Sunday afternoon as her daughter, Christine, looks on. Like many others who worked all weekend on the project, Mrs. Mills said she was relieved when it was over. "We were looking forward to this since last fall and now it's done. It's great."

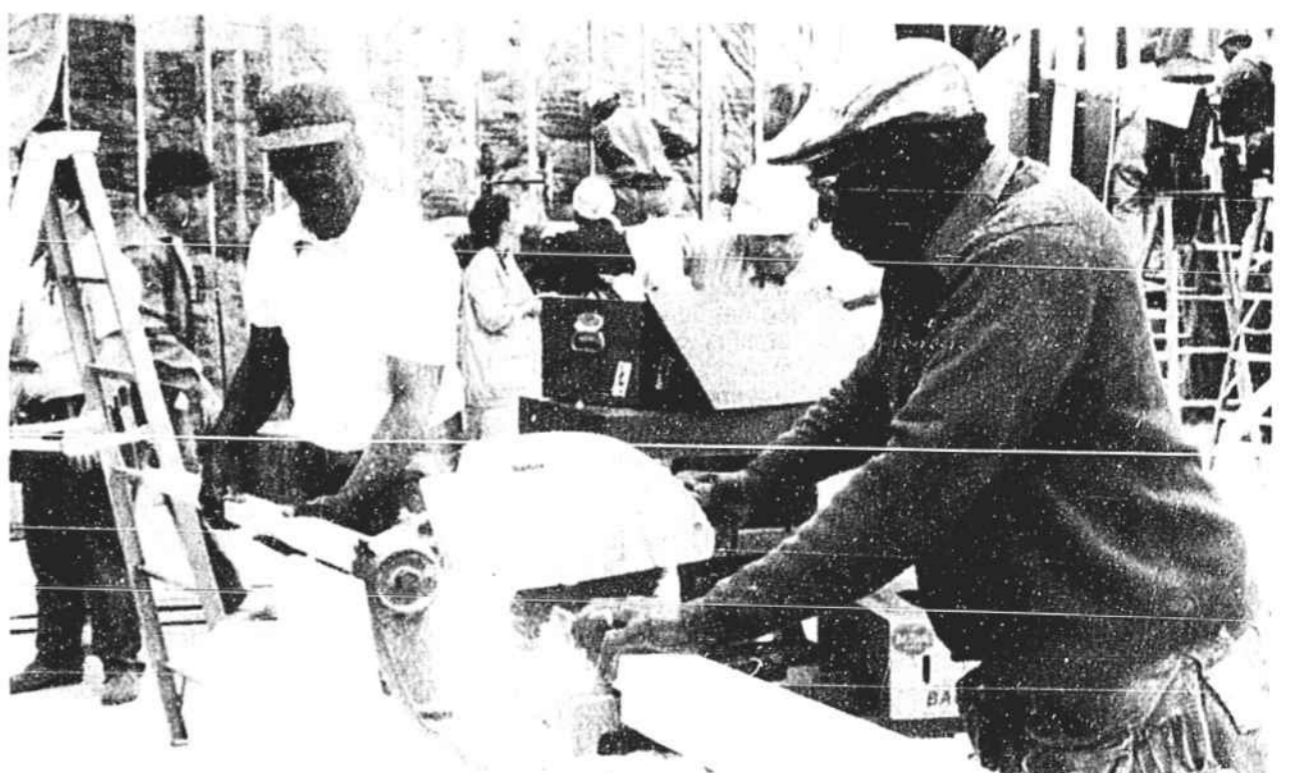


RUDY PATTERSON of Columbia, S.C., was laying brick early Friday afternoon. He was one of about 300 volunteers on site when the church-raising began at 7 a.m. Friday.



DUCTWORK on the Kingdom Hall's air conditioning system was the task for these two helpers from Columbia, S.C., Friday afternoon. Frank Torres, left, and

Justin Toole said they have participated in six other quick-build projects this year.



JOSEPH BRANTLEY, right, of Beaufort, S.C., cuts wooden studs as Monroe Snooks of Ridgeland, S.C., assists. Both said they have been involved in many

quick-build projects in the past and enjoy traveling to different places across the Carolinas.