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Campers on Mission Help Build Newkirk First Baptist Church



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NEWKIRK — You can't miss seeing the nearly dozen recreational vehicles parked along the east side of U.S. 77 near Dry Road, just south of the City of Newkirk. The RV's belong to tradespeople working on the interior of the new fellowship hall for Newkirk's First Baptist Church and all are volunteers and members of the Oklahoma chapter of Campers on Mission.

Campers on Mission is a national fellowship of Christian campers who share their faith while camping and as the opportunity permits, according to the Web site of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. It was organized in the early 1970's and is sponsored by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Membership is open to Christian campers of all denominations.

One of the ongoing missions of the group is to volunteer construction assistance to local church congregations to help stretch budget dollars and to provide Christian service opportunities.

"We'll be here about three weeks to finish out the interior of the fellowship hall," says volunteer John Barnes, age 67 from Shawnee and the president of the Oklahoma chapter.

Barnes explains that most Campers on Mission volunteers are retired, with the group working with him on Wednesday ranging in age from 62 up to the eldest, 96-year-old Murrel McMahan of Oklahoma City, who has been volunteering since 1981.

Campers on Mission accept short-term mission construction assignments, typically lasting up to three or four weeks, says Barnes.

"God's been good to us, and we're just trying to give a little bit back," added Barnes.

Local church members feed the workers during their stay, with volunteer workers coming for different lengths of time — from just a few days up to the full three weeks.

"They feed us real good, nobody's losing weight here," joked Ernest Wakeman, 77, of McLoud.

The Newkirk church members contracted with the Leonard Building Company of Oklahoma City to construct the exterior shell of the 100-foot by 141-foot structure (14,100 square feet) and purchases all the construction materials. Once the exterior was completed, Campers on Mission and local volunteers moved in to then build out the interior.

"This [volunteer service] is saving us many thousands of dollars," says local member and volunteer worker Leon Whittington. He estimated that local costs for the exterior contractor and materials will total approximately \$450,000. Volunteer labor will save about \$70,000, he added, with the finished fellowship hall valued over \$1 million.

For more information on Campers on Mission, go to their website at www.bgco.org/4955.

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