Son's property gift honors mother's legacy



Holston Home Board of Directors Facilities Committee Chairman Kent Bewley, holding scissors at left, and past-board chairman Jeff Monson, right, do the honors during the ribbon cutting to dedicate the new Fuschia Stines Anderson Building in Greeneville, Tenn., Thursday, May ... more >

By EUGENIA ESTES - *Associated Press - Saturday, May 12, 2018*

GREENEVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Bill Anderson had a vision to help the organization his mother spent years serving.

Now, students at Holston United Methodist Home for Children are using that gift - the grounds Anderson grew up on - to serve the Greeneville community.

And it's all being done in the name of Anderson's mother.

Holston Home's new Fuschia Stines Anderson Building was dedicated in a ceremony Thursday. The building will be home to the "Living Room," a quiet place for prayer and reflection for the entire community.

The property was the site of William "Bill" Anderson's childhood home in the 1930s. Now 91, the Lexington, Virginia, resident could not attend the dedication due to health issues, but Holston Home President Bradley Williams said he was honored to share what Anderson told him about his mother, his home and his desire to honor her love of children and families.

"When he decided to give this gift to Holston Home, he decided that he wanted to act on the seeds and the love that his mom had taught him," Williams said. "And he wanted those seeds carried forward to her passion and care about kids."

"As we stand here today, I don't want us to just see this building and this parking lot," he continued. "I want to encourage us to picture the heart and roots of the Anderson family that make this day possible."

That picture began with the love that a local farmer had for his daughter when he purchased a large Victorian farmhouse for her. That daughter, "Miss Fuschia," married Nick Anderson, and the family grew to include a son, "Billy Frank."

Tragedy struck when her husband was killed in an accident, leaving Miss Fuschia a widow and single mother at the beginning of the Great Depression.

"What Bill shared was what he watched and what he saw in the house he grew up in," Williams continued. "He watched his mom rely on her faith, her love of family and her grittiness to go right down here on Depot Street and work as a clerk at Woolworth's."

She also made use of the many bedrooms in the Victorian farmhouse, converting them into apartments to help make ends meet.

"Resourceful as she was, she felt a deeper calling," he continued. "And somehow . she was able to carpool and find her way to follow her calling to become a teacher."

Paying her way through college, she became a teacher of first- and second-graders at what was then known as the Holston Orphanage, Williams said.

"She taught those kids not just academics," he said. "She taught them what it meant to lead and live a meaningful life."

Her son inherited his mother's resourcefulness and grit. At age 12, young Billy Frank learned that there was a World's Fair in New York and decided he wanted to see it.

"I don't know all the details, I think it involved a train, but Billy Frank found himself in New York City as a 12-year-old," Williams said, adding he could not imagine Miss Fuschia took that very well.

When Bill, as he is known now, was 16, he joined the U.S. Navy to serve in World War II. After the war, he attended the University of Tennessee, where he was manager and public director of the "Pride of the Southland" marching band.

A career journalist, Anderson started at The Greeneville Sun. His journey took him to the Chicago Tribune, where he held various positions, including as Pentagon correspondent in Washington, D.C., city editor and national correspondent.

In the meantime, the property where Anderson's childhood home once stood was turned to commercial property as downtown Greeneville's business footprint expanded. For several decades, a succession of banks occupied the property. At some point, Anderson's childhood home was demolished.

When Anderson contacted Holston Home about his desire to donate his childhood property, the next part of the story began, Williams recalled.

"I get so excited and dream about how God is going to use this gift of love and what he is going to do with it," he said. "It is easy for me to dream big for the future, because I have already seen how God has used it."

The former bank building had water damage. Maintenance staff and youth from Holston Home worked together to renovate and repair the building. The young men learned how to tear out walls and install floors and ceilings, Williams said.

An advisory board of young people was formed to decide what to do with the site. The story behind he donation and the options available were shared with them before they began considering the purpose it could serve.

"What they endorsed was a plan to partner with a local ministry to create a house of prayer," Williams said. "It is going to be called the 'Living Room,' where volunteers are here and they allow people to come in, spend time alone, spend time asking for prayer for something they may be going through or just lend a loving, caring ear. Doesn't that should like a good, godly mother? Doesn't that sound like Mrs. Fuschia?"

For the dedication, Holston Home youth created artwork to show how they honor and appreciate their mothers. Their creations were displayed inside.

Williams said that Anderson shared with him how, up until she died in 1989 at the age of 83, "Miss Fuschia" continued to received gifts of appreciation from her pupils.

Anderson also shared that his mother's last words to him were, "get back to work," Williams said. "It was the kind of mandate expected from a teacher and a mother who had survived with purpose through trial and tribulation. . A good cause with purpose is timeless."

Nikki Niswonger thanked Anderson for the gift. She was asked to speak during the dedication Thursday as a mother who has also worked to improve the community through such organizations as the Niswonger Foundation and Youth Builders of Greeneville Inc.

"Beginning today, Mr. Bill Anderson's heartfelt gift will forever reflect his appreciation for all his mother did for him and also perpetuate Miss Fuschia's legacy of kindness to others," she said. "The dedication for this building is perfectly timed as Mother's Day is this Sunday."

She recalled that many of the buildings used by such organizations as the YWCA, the library and community in her hometown of Van Wert, Ohio, were donated by visionary, philanthropic families in the town.

"These donors were motivated to help those who were in need, inspire those to carry on their vision and prepare us all to better serve our neighbors and our God," Niswonger said.

"I have never met those families," she said. "I never had the chance to thank them for the wonderful life they gave me. But their example has guided my life every step of the way."

The various beautiful buildings that bless the streets of Greeneville "all reflect who we are as a community. Those buildings tell visitors we care about our children's education, we are inspired by the arts and that we anchor our daily lives in our faith. And now with Mr. Anderson's gift of this buildling, our visitors will know we care about those who need a place to reflect and to refresh."

Niswonger closed with a Mother's Day challenge. "As you leave this dedication today I challenge you to energize your inner philanthropic heart to offer a random act of kindness to someone who crosses your path. Honor your mother with a gift of love to someone in need. Let's all be the Mrs. Fuschia in someone's life."

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