HOLSTON HOME

'Leave This World Better Than You Found It'



SUN PHOTO BY MICHAEL S. RENEAU

University of Tennessee head men's basketball coach Rick Barnes was the keynote speaker at the Holston United Methodist Home for Children's annual Friends of Children benefit dinner Thursday night.

UT Coach Shares Inspirational Message At Annual Dinner

BY WAYNE PHILLIPS
SPORTS EDITOR EMERITUS

Everyone who follows college basketball knows that success has followed Coach Rick Barnes at each corner he has turned during his long coaching career.

Not as many people know of the popular University of Tennessee coaches' faith and the steps he has taken over the years to make his love for Jesus Christ more

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SUN PHOTO BY MICHAEL S. RENEAU

Holston Home's Abel Carrico, right, leads a choir Thursday night during Holston Home's benefit dinner.

BARNES

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important than the game of basketball.

Thursday night before an overflow crowd at the General Morgan Inn, a throng that was gathered for Holston United Methodist Home for Children's annual Benefit Dinner, the coach kept the group mesmerized with a speech about faith and his personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The 2017-18 season saw the Vols, picked as low as 13th out of 14 teams competing in the Southeastern Conference when the year began, win the SEC title and make it to the round of 32 in the NCAA Tournament before bowing out with a season record of 26-9.

Barnes, a Hickory, North Carolina, native, has coached for 31 years, and 23 of those seasons have ended with his team competing in the NCAA Tournament. His head coaching stints were at George Mason, Providence, Clemson and Texas before the Longhorns turned him loose in 2015 and the Volunteers, searching for a coach, quickly gobbled him up.

"I thought I would be at Texas the rest of my life," Barnes said, smiling at the crowd. "But God had a plan, and I honestly feel his plan was for me to come to Tennessee."

Barnes grew up under meager circumstances in Hickory, and he told the gathering of a youngster who grew up in that North Carolina town that didn't like elementary school, tried to do things to get himself suspended from school, refused to do homework, and almost left school for keeps at one point. That youngster the coach was referring to was himself.



SUN PHOTO BY MICHAEL S. RENEAU

A full crowd for the Holston United Methodist Home for Children's benefit dinner listened to Rick Barnes Thursday at the General Morgan Inn.



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Holston Home President and CEO Bradley Williams shares stories of individuals whose lives have been changed by Holston Home.

It wasn't until he reached the ninth grade that a teacher named Alice Watts told him that he couldn't practice basketball for the school team until he did his homework. He described Alice Watts as "one of my life heroes."

"Just like many of you in this group tonight are doing, you are stepping up to help kids who need it," he said. "If you can work with kids, instill confidence in them like Alice Watts did for me, you can be a hero to them."

Once one of the youngest head coaches in the NCAA, and now one of the elder statesman of the sport, Barnes is not the same coach he was several years ago. The change came about 10 years ago when Barnes' two children came to him and told him he needed to change his life.

"The kids told me that I wasn't treating them right, wasn't treating their mother right, and I needed to change," he recalled. "I was upset at first, but I soon realized what they were saying was true.

"I had lied to some parents," he said. "I told them when I recruited their kid I would treat them like I would want to be treated. But I didn't. I learned that the most important thing in life is to have a relationship with Jesus Christ."

Barnes calls his children two more of his "heroes." His son is a missionary in the Middle East. His daughter and son-in-law adoped a child from Uganda, and later moved there to work at an orphanage.

Barnes described himself as a "demanding" coach, but he noted that despite the popular belief that "kids have changed," he doesn't think the youngsters he coaches have changed that much.

"Every player comes in with the dream of making it in the NBA," he said. "Do you know it's easier to become a brain surgeon than to make it in the NBA? So I talk to them about separating themselves from the competition, making sure they earn what they get."

He spoke of Kevin Durant, one of basketball's greatest current players whom Barnes tutored at Texas.

"Kevin Durant was one of the hardest working players I've ever coached," Barnes said. "He told me he worked so hard because he never wanted to look back on his career and think, 'I could have been better' (if he had worked harder)."

Barnes said he also stresses to his players to "leave this world better than you found it," and makes sure they know that "there is not a greater gift than the grace of God."

The coach was introduced by Ken Bewley, a Holston Home Board of Trustees member, who served as master of ceremonies. Bradley Williams, the Home's president and CEO, also spoke to the crowd, thanking the donors for what they do for the youngsters served by Holston Home. He shared stories of how individual lives have been changed by Holston Home.

Construction is currently underway for a new chapel on Holston Home's campus. But Bewley reminded the group how important events like Thursday night are for the organization. Because of fundraising events and gifts from donors, the chapel is already paid for and Holston Home is debt free, he said.