

Lifestyles



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GREENE COUNTY RECORD

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Principal of UCA leaves legacy of faith, caring

BY KATHLEEN BORRELLI
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"She didn't need ears to hear; she used her heart."

Barbara "Bobbie" Lee Powell (née Woods), principal of United Christian Academy in Stanardsville for the past 44 years, died of complications from COVID-19 on Oct. 10. Admitted to intensive care in the hospital Sept. 16 with a diagnosis of double pneumonia caused by the virus, she was put on a ventilator the next day after a blood clot entered her heart and died three weeks later of sepsis and congestive heart failure.

"She thought she had hay fever, because she gets it every year this time of year," said son Phillip Powell, who has served as pastor of First Bible Baptist Church and UCA since 2015. "It ended up being COVID ... she was in intensive care for 21 days."

Husband Raymond E. Powell, who serves as the school's athletic director, was also hospitalized with COVID-19 for five days but is recovering at home. In Phillip's last conversation with his mother, they spoke on FaceTime before she was intubated and her main concern was for the school.

"I'm in serious condition; I may not make it out of here and you're going to have some very hard decisions to make," Phillip recalled his mother saying. "Lean on Christ—trust Him—but please, whatever you do, do not let the school stop. I gave 44 years of my life for those young people—don't let it stop."

Phillip does not intend to let the school stop, and is serving as interim administrator until the school can determine who will take over as principal.

"I believe you have an appointed time, and I don't care if it's COVID—I don't care if it's a car wreck, a heart attack—I believe you have an appointed time," Phillip said. "The Lord has a day that he knows he's going to call you home and no matter what, Oct. 10 was mom's day. ... But when I say goodbye, it's not forever; it's just for now, and I know I'll see her again when I get to heaven."

A memorial service in Bobbie's honor was held at the school on Saturday, Oct. 23, and a video of the service is also available on the school's Facebook page.

Early years

Born May 31, 1951, to the Rev. James E. Woods (1927-2017) and Nancy Collins Woods (1933-2018), Bobbie and her sister Jo Ann Woods (now a kindergarten teacher at Nathanael Greene Primary School) spent every Sunday traveling to Stanardsville to hear their father preach.

"He preached in the little white church up on Pocosan



PHOTOS COURTESY WOODS/POWELL FAMILY
Bobbie Lee Woods (1951-2021) as a child with her father, the Rev. James E. Woods (1927-2017)

Mountain," Phillip said. "They would walk from the bottom of South River up to the top of that mountain for two years."

After two years commuting to his hometown in Greene County on weekends while managing a tile company in Northern Virginia, James Woods started preaching in a tent in a field just off of U.S. 33 before purchasing the ground to build First Bible Baptist Church.

Meanwhile, Bobbie graduated from William Monroe High School in 1969, where she met Ray Powell—quarterback of Monroe's first football team—and the two fell in love. Bobbie was crowned Miss Greene County in 1970 while a freshman at Washington Bible College. Ray lived across Pea Ridge Road from Bobbie, and soon they were engaged.

"The church was actually built and opened up in 1969 and it burnt to the ground," Phillip said. Mom made Dad wait three years to marry her because she wouldn't get married unless she was getting married in that church."

On March 31, 1974, Bobbie and Ray were married at her father's church with Rev. James Woods officiating the ceremony. Their son, Phillip, was born in November 1976 and Bobbie opened a small day care center in what was once the Stanardsville fire house, which she ran for several years while UCA was being built.

"The word around town at that time was they were starting a school so I would have a place to go to school," Phillip joked. "I was 2 years old."

The school was officially dedicated in 1979 as a ministry of First Bible Baptist Church and the first year it had 13 students. Phillip was one of the first students to attend kindergarten through 12th grade at UCA, graduating in 1994.

"Come walk with me"

Bobbie Powell was never



A 1969 graduate of William Monroe High School, Bobbie Woods was voted Miss Greene County in 1970.



Bobbie served as principal of United Christian Academy for 44 years.



From left, grandchildren Drew, Jordan, Leah and Thomas joined Bobbie and Ray Powell on a recent outing. "Grandma loved her babies; they were her pride and joy," said son Phillip Powell.

Woods to let anything get in the way of her goals. At age 16, she began to rapidly lose her hearing. By the time she was 20, she only had 2% of her

sense of hearing remaining—but that was never an impediment to her faith, according to family and friends.

"The kids in the school

would say if you don't want Ms. Powell to know what you said, you'd better turn your back because she can read

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PAPA JOHN'S
BETTER INGREDIENTS.
BETTER PIZZA.
Ruckersville

Dragon Football Club

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

October 22, 2021

William Monroe at Warren Co.

#35 JR Tanner Williams LB/FB

Tanner turned in an outstanding defensive performance with 15 tackles, 1 tackle for loss and 1 forced fumble.



Bobbie

Continued from B1

lips from one end of the hallway to the other," Phillip said.

"She was very wise in that she always listened first before she would speak," said Faith Vargas, who has served as preschool director and elementary principal at the school for the past seven years. "She would observe people; she could see strengths and weaknesses and she always capitalized on people's strengths and just made it work. ...

My life will never be the same because I've had the opportunity to work with someone of that dedication; of that caliber of caring, that degree of selflessness."

When asked if it was strange to describe a hearing-impaired person as a great listener, Vargas said not at all, "because I think she listened with her heart. She didn't need ears to hear—she used her heart, and that made it very successful."

"She didn't ever think she would be a principal; she wanted to be a kindergarten teacher and she wanted to teach; but the Lord led her into being the principal and she was the principal here for 44 years," Phillip said. "She basically gave her life for this place ... she was here at four in the morning until whatever time at night every day."

In spring 2020, the students at UCA were hard at work preparing for a World Fair event, with tents set up in the gym to represent different countries across the world.

"She'd come and get you and say, 'come here—come walk with me,'" Vargas said. "And we'd go and see whatever project she was working on. ... She was pulling kids out of class and helping them with their display boards and getting it set up in the gym downstairs."

With the government-mandated shut down of schools on March 12, 2020—just four days before the planned event—Bobbie tried to find an alternate solution.

"She was really bothered by that, that the kids weren't going to get that closure to this proj-



PHOTO BY BRIAN MELLOTT/FOR THE GREENE COUNTY RECORD

Phillip Powell, pastor of First Bible Baptist Church and acting administrator of UCA since his mom's passing, spoke at a memorial at the school Saturday.

ect that they had done and had worked so hard on," Vargas said.

Bobbie organized volunteers from UCA staff to dress up in costume and create videos of each project, which they sent out weekly during the end of the 2019-2020 school year when all students were learning remotely.

"You would think she would be busy, but it didn't matter—if you came to her and said, hey, do you have a minute, she always had a minute," said Krystal Lauer, who attended UCA herself and now has three boys in school there. "We would have academic competitions and she would stay and help me create visuals and she would teach me how to give public presentations, which has been a key to life in general. ... She went beyond her job and into the evening to help me as a student be successful in life."

From mentoring her as a student to helping her as a parent, Lauer said she found a lifelong friend in Bobbie.

"Honestly, one of the best pieces of advice she has given me—and don't get me wrong, she gave me a ton of advice as a student and she helped me succeed as a student and get into college—but she said to me, 'Krystal, God knew that your children needed you as their mother; there was nobody else in the world that could be their mother other than you.' And that just sticks with me," Lauer said. "She welcomed me as a kindergartener, but she still mentored me now as an adult, which I just think is one of life's

greatest gifts to have somebody like that in your life."

Lauer also said she admired Bobbie's faith.

"I don't think I ever remember seeing her without a smile," she said. "I even took care of her father prior to his passing and she came up to me with a smile and put her hand on my shoulder—that's how she always greeted me. Of course she was heartbroken her father was ill, but she still came to me with that smile and (said), 'Well I know he's in God's hands.' No matter the challenge that stood before her, she could still smile because she had that faith."

When James Woods passed away at the age of 90, Phillip took over as head pastor.

The future of UCA

Phillip and Karrie Powell had four children—Thomas (born 1996), Leah (1999), Jordan (2001) and Drew (2003), and all four have been students and active participants at UCA since they were born. Thomas is the assistant athletic director, along with sister Leah. Jordan works for Phillip in the tile business, which he learned from his great-grandfather. Leah teaches K-4 and just got married, and Drew will be graduating from UCA this year.

"My four kids were Grandma's babies and she loved them to death; she helped them through school," Phillip said. "They were her pride and joy."

Bobbie was really looking forward to seeing her only granddaughter get married and her last grandchild

graduate, but unfortunately did not have that opportunity.

"I married my daughter on Saturday and buried my mom on Sunday," Phillip said. "Leah and her were not just granddaughter and grandmother—they were best friends. It was hard on all of us but it was really hard on Leah."

Having been on site during the school's building and serving as principal for all but two years of its tenure, it's fair to say no one knew the vision of UCA better than Bobbie Powell.

"Everything she did was about this school and about these kids because she said if we can impact kids at a young age for Christ, it'll make a difference as they grow," Phillip said. "The school is what it is because of mom and the teachers that she's hired and helped along the way—she couldn't do it



COURTESY PHOTO

Bobbie (Woods) Powell and Jo Ann Woods celebrated their parents' 25th wedding anniversary in 1975.

alone; but this was her baby."

"She really imparted the vision to us that the work that we do here is not temporary," Vargas said. "Now she's no longer with us, the work will continue to go on because that's how she set it up to be—so that what we do, the impact we make, is going to carry on for generations as well. And I think that's how she'll be remembered; she didn't just do her work for a lifetime, she did it for eternity."

"She was just a gentle, loving soul and she treated everyone equally," said Lauer, who has known Bobbie for 39 years. "Being the principal of this school was definitely her calling and such a gift."

Lauer said that Bobbie's impact had a ripple effect in the community.

"She loved me and educated me and gave me the ability to speak clearly and have that solid grammar foundation which got me into college for my desire to be a nurse," she said. "So all those students that she has impacted and that went on to spread their love and their talents in the community—that's just an ocean of impact. I can only hope that I have that kind of impact in life for people."

For more photos of Bobbie and her family, check the school's Facebook page.

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