

After 57 years of service, Levelland church secretary files away memories_92004

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By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

LEVELLAND—When Charlene Shifflett started working at First Baptist Church in Levelland, she struggled to figure out office machines. Little did anyone—including Shifflett—realize she would outlast the machines many times over and become the “backbone of the congregation.”

She laughs frequently as she looks back on her 57 years as the congregation's financial secretary, a position she accepted shortly after graduating from high school. She retired Aug. 29.

“I was just looking for a job,” Shifflett said with a giggle.

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| Charlene Shifflett |
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She remembers toying with a mimeograph machine, a messy printer that makes copies by pressing ink through a stencil, with the help of one of

seven pastors she would serve. It took awhile, but together they figured out how to work each piece of office equipment.

Shifflett becomes even more upbeat as her thoughts transition to the congregation and staff members. It is the love she felt among the staff members and church that kept her going.

"It just became my home," she said, referring to pastors as brothers, church members as brothers and sisters and younger people as her children.

And members of the congregation think of her the same way. Loyce Newman, one of Shifflett's friends and a member of First Baptist Church, said many people view the secretary as a sister. Younger members see a mother, and the youngest children consider her another grandmother.

Shifflett's pure heart shines in every moment of her life, Pastor Steve Vernon added.

Newman said she turns every life difficulty into a ministry opportunity.

Beyond her work, she has ministered in the nursery and taught Sunday school.

She's also a "walking reference," Vernon said. She seemingly knows everything about the church's history. She remembers pastors, staff and members alike. The congregation knows Shifflett puts her heart into her work and performs up to the highest standard.

"It's a little hard to put in words," Newman said of what Shifflett means to the congregation. "She's been an all-around person in the church."

Shifflett is thankful for the relationships she has had during her tenure, but has sensed it's time to retire. The decision does not sadden her. She laughs again as she talks about a "surprise" retirement banquet Aug. 29 the

congregation knew she knew about.

She will continue being a part of the congregation and is training her successor. When her protégé struggles, Shifflett reminds her gently that “after 50 years, you won't have to worry about it.”

Retirement may be a far cry from handling the books regularly. She plans to spend more time with her grandchildren and hopes to follow her passion, painting. In particular, the secretary wants to teach children to be painters so they can experience the same joy she has in her hobby.

“I don't know if I'll even want to balance my checkbook, but I'll always paint,” she said.

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