

Hymnal holds more than three decades of precious memories

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DALLAS—Ken Shotts, 82, remembers everything he learns about the residents at Buckner Retirement Village. To help him remember, writes it all down in his hymnal—the same book he's used more than three and a half decades.

"I write down the numbers of the songs that we use each Sunday," he said, pointing out his notes and showing obituaries of beloved friends from the retirement community. "I've written the names of most of the people that have lived here."

The note-filled pages of his hymnal tell the stories of so many lives touched by his presence.

Ken Shotts, an 82-year-old volunteer from Grand View Baptist Church in Mesquite, has been singing hymns and greeting seniors at the Sunday morning worship services at Buckner Retirement Village for the last 36 years. (Photo by Vanessa Mosharaf/Buckner)

For 36 years, Shotts, a retiree and member of Grand View Baptist Church in Mesquite, has been welcoming residents to Sunday morning worship services at Buckner Retirement Village.

"And that's a lot longer than any of you have been here," he told residents sitting in a recent Sunday morning service.

Shotts started volunteering with Buckner out of his love for missions, he said, and now is one of Buckner's most faithful volunteers. He explained how many people think it's necessary to leave the country to do missions, but he fulfills the need close to home.

"The love that I have for this group of people, it's a way of serving the Lord," he said.

After years of helping in a place where life is so fragile, Shotts said he relies on God to cope with his losses.

"Not knowing whether everyone that is here this Sunday will be here next Sunday is hard," he said. "God gives us the strength to sustain us during a time of need, and that's what keeps me going. ... Every Sunday is filled with memories."

Shotts recalls a widow and widower who met each other at the church service and fell in love. The pair married in the same chapel at a Sunday church service.

Johnnie Shephard, a Buckner resident who is also a member of Grand View, said she appreciates Shotts' presence each Sunday morning because it makes her feel more at home.

After serving for 36 years, Shotts sees no end in sight. And no one questions his dedication; instead, they depend on him for a smile, a hymn and a prayer.

"I have no way of knowing how long God's going to give me the strength to keep on doing this," he said. "For now, he has supplied the strength to keep on keeping on."