



Shop eBay your way SEARCH

Save an average of \$383 on auto insurance.

# roanoke.com

THE ROANOKE TIMES

Tuesday, April 20, 2010 67°F

LOGIN TO YOUR ACCOUNT: Email Address \*\*\*\*\* GO

Forgot Password? | Not a User? Sign up

CHECK THIS OUT! Movie reviews and listings

BREAKING NEWS: Breaking News Updated: 1:37 PM Judge certifies murder charge in Salem roommate's killing

Search roanoke.com EVENTS CALENDAR: Apr 2010 Upcoming Events: 04/21 Monthly Meeting, MCL RV Det #426, 04/21 Instructional Gymnastics Class Session II, more events >>

roanoke.com | newrivervalley.com | News | Sports | Entertainment | Community | Video | Business | Opinion | Blogs | Pets | Celebrations | Obituaries | Classified

Email story Print story Share story RSS feeds

Wednesday, March 04, 2009

jobs.roanoke.com | homes.roanoke.com | cars.roanoke.com

.....Advertisement.....

## Rock church

A popular artist is moved to assist a famed Patrick County church with its fundraising project.

By Ralph Berrier Jr. | ralph.berrier@roanoke.com | 981-3338



Kyle Green | The Roanoke Times

Jim Saunders of Mayberry Presbyterian Church in Patrick County holds an original painting by artist William Mangum. As a fundraising project, the Greensboro, N.C., artist agreed to do a rendering of the church for a fraction of his original fee.



The Rev. Stewart Childress stands outside of Bluemont Presbyterian Church in Carroll County, one of the famous "rock churches" built by his grandfather in the 1920s and '30s.



The interior of Mayberry Presbyterian Church.



The Rev. Bob Childress built or restored six churches, all covered in stone.

MEADOWS OF DAN -- Jim Saunders didn't have to move a mountain to help his church. He just needed an idea, faith and a whole lot of charm.

An eye for art didn't hurt, either.

Saunders is a tall, burly, 75-year-old retired Air Force man who attends Mayberry Presbyterian Church in Patrick County. The church is one of the famed "rock churches," once overseen by the saintly pastor Bob Childress, a man whose tireless ministry to the mountain people of Patrick, Carroll and Floyd counties was chronicled in a book.

Covered with a facing of native fieldstone, Mayberry Presbyterian is a pretty little church that sits beside the Blue Ridge Parkway like a prim little old lady in the front pew. Pretty enough for a picture, in fact, which gave Saunders an idea.

Saunders would be the first to tell you he's not much of an art lover, but he sure does like William Mangum's watercolor paintings. So do a lot of other people.

Mangum is a popular artist in Greensboro, N.C., whose paintings of North Carolina landscapes, seascapes, homes and country churches command top dollar. Saunders thought that a Mangum rendering of the Mayberry church might make a good fundraising project.

The church, you see, needs money. The congregation is aging and wants to attract new members, especially young families with children. The best way to do that, the church leaders decided, is to build a fellowship hall that could play host to a multitude of events: dinners, youth activities, receptions, anything that might bring more people to church.

So, Saunders left his home in the mountains and drove to Mangum's gallery in Greensboro to see if the famous artist would paint a picture of the quaint little stone-covered church.

He met Mangum's assistant and gallery director, Joy Ross. She asked if Saunders would like to commission a work.

"Commission?" Saunders said. "What's that? You mean like a lieutenant gets a commission in the military?"

No, a commission as in the price the church would pay to hire Mangum to do the work. That price: \$12,000.

Staggered, Saunders thanked Ross and told her that his little church could not afford such a fee.

As he left, he handed Ross a book to pass along to Mangum. It was called "The Man Who Moved a Mountain."

The next week, Saunders received a call from Mangum himself. He would do the painting at a fraction of the original fee -- for less than \$3,000. Sometimes, you just have to bring the mountain to Mangum.

### A living legacy

The Rev. Stewart Childress estimates the average age of Mayberry Presbyterian's membership is between 65 and 70. He believes a fellowship hall will be a boon to the congregation, but the project might cost \$300,000.

"We believe we've got to have a building like that to carry out the legacy," said Childress, who is the grandson of Bob Childress, the man who presided over the rock churches from the 1920s until his death in 1956.

### Prints

To purchase a print of William Mangum's painting of Mayberry Presbyterian Church, contact Jim Saunders at (276) 952-2516 or ellen@blueridgecreations.com.

Prices are: large print (22 inches by 27 inches), \$200; small print (8-by-11), \$30; box of eight cards (3-by-5), \$13

The church also sells copies of "The Man Who Moved a Mountain," by the late Richard C. Davids for \$16.

"We're afraid the legacy grandpa started will die out with the people."

What a loss that would be. The story of the Rev. Bob Childress is well-known in these parts. He grew up poor in a rough section of Patrick County known simply as The Hollow. In his unfinished autobiography, Childress claimed that his earliest memory was that of his mother stuffing a whiskey-soaked rag into his mouth to nurse an illness.

He wrote of that memory, "When I was not quite 3, I got drunk. That's the first thing I remember in my whole life."

He grew up a brawler and a drinker, until one morning he woke up from a bender and heard the sounds of church singing. From that day forward, he dedicated his life to serving the Lord. He married, raised seven children and attended the seminary in his 30s. He returned to his mountain home and built or restored six churches, all covered in stone.

Those churches still stand today -- Mayberry, Bluemont, Buffalo Mountain, Slate Mountain, Dinwiddie and Willis. All but the Willis church are Presbyterian congregations.

Like his grandfather, Stewart Childress waited until late in life to attend seminary. After stints in the Army and the corporate world, Childress studied to become a pastor in his 50s. Now 56, he is the pastor at Bluestone Presbyterian and the supply pastor at Mayberry, which is named not for the fictional town of "The Andy Griffith Show," but for the local community.

"When I was in seminary, people asked, 'Do Andy and Gomer go to your church?'" he said. Actually, the church has been around since the 1920s.

In the late '50s, shortly after Bob Childress died, a Philadelphia newspaperman by the name of Richard Davids came to the mountains and wrote a book about the late country minister. That book, "The Man Who Moved a Mountain," is still widely available at stops along the parkway.

That's the book Saunders left with Mangum.

### A work of art

So, why did Mangum agree to do the painting for a considerably lower fee? Just ask his assistant.

"Have you ever met Jim?" Ross said with a laugh. "He has a very persuasive personality."

After Mangum agreed to do the painting, Saunders pestered the artist to work quickly. The church really wanted prints by Christmas. Saunders would arrive at the gallery, always unannounced, and tease Ross about her job and inquire about the painting.

At one point, he even brought a bucket of paint from Lowe's, affixed with a note to Mangum that read, "When you get done painting our picture, you can paint our house."

"He has that 'pick-on-you' sense of humor," Ross said. "He reminds me of members of my own family. Inevitably, you want to jump hurdles for them."

The book didn't hurt, either. Mangum said he read about three-quarters of "The Man Who Moved a Mountain" before he started work on the painting.

"It was fascinating," Mangum said by telephone from his studio. "It reminded me very much of the parable of the lost son. Here was a man of whom little was expected, and he found his way to serve the Lord."

Mangum did work quickly. He visited the church on Labor Day weekend and shot a few photos. He decided to cast the scene in snow, with lights glowing in the church windows.

"I took some artistic license," Mangum said. "It was technically easy to create."

The original painting was ready by November. Only 400 limited edition prints are available for sale. The church is also selling smaller prints and boxes of cards. Prices range from \$13 for cards to \$200 for large prints. The original painting is also for sale -- for \$10,000.

Even if the church sells all of its prints and cards, the net profit will only be about \$50,000, well short of the amount needed to build the new fellowship hall.

"The intent is to raise awareness," Childress said. "The sales help us, but we want to get the word out."

That's what Saunders is doing. If there's a festival or meeting in the three-county area, he's there with boxes of cards and prints, trying to raise money to help his church survive and thrive. They've sold about 40 prints so far.

"I'm selling the sizzle, not the steak," he said.

Become a Pastor With an Online Pastoral Degree. Study Online, in your spare time. EarnMyDegree.com

Fireplace Veneers Beautiful, Affordable, Easy Install Request A Brochure For More Info! www.EldoradoStone.com

Local Churches Find churches, synagogues & other places of worship in your area. yellowpages.com

Ads by Google

### Site Index

Table with 7 columns: News, Sports, Entertainment, Local, Online features, Do business with us, Classified. Each column lists various categories and sub-categories.