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Retirement--A Missing Word
In Willard Weeks' Vocabulary

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Retirement for "Dad" Weeks, manager of Ridgecrest Baptist Assembly means more time for community and church involvement.

Willard K. Weeks is retiring after 17 years of service with the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention--which has often constrained him to a life of "second-mile" Christianity.

With the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians as his covenant, and undergirded by the thousands of Baptists around the world who lovingly and sincerely call him "Dad," he goes about plans for "retirement" as enthusiastically as he pursues his work.

"'Dad' is just a one job man," says Mrs. Weeks. "When he finishes his job here at Ridgecrest, then he'll plan something else." "Retirement" in the usual sense just is not in Weeks' vocabulary.

The little valley of Black Mountain won't lose the Weeks family this fall, for they will remain there and receive the many visits of former assembly staffers in their home designed and furnished by him for the retirement years.

The Ridgecrest manager has been a summer father to almost 7,000 summer staff members since 1950. The staff of 1951 tagged him "Dad" and Mrs. Zelma Weeks, "Mom."

The couple place the hundreds of cards and letters they get from former staff members on Father's and Mother's Days on a dresser mirror in their room "just so we can remember them and enjoy them a little longer."

"We make it a point to answer every letter," says Weeks. "We might not say much, but we do say something."

"What makes the assembly is the people," says Mrs. Weeks. "When nobody is here, it's just a bunch of buildings."

Staffers remember Weeks as the kind of man who eats breakfast with them at 6:45 in the staff dining hall, although he never has to. He could eat at home or with the assembly guests at 7:30.

As one staffer recalls, "'Dad' is always there, if for no other reason than to give reassurance that a calm hand is at the helm and that this day is just as important as the one before."

Weeks makes a point to tell staffers that his home is always open to them. Whether or not a staffer ever visits them, he knows he can always discuss his problems or joys with 'Dad' and 'Mom' Weeks.

Weeks is never without a pocketful of candy or a full candy dish on his desk. One staffer says, "I think giving this candy is a symbolic gesture of his unending desire to give of himself to others." Even those who haven't been staffers for many years aren't surprised when Weeks slips them a piece of candy when they meet.

Born in Clinton, Mass., Weeks formed a partnership with his father as building contractors in the firm of W. E. Weeks and Son of St. Petersburg, Fla., for 16 years. While in Florida, Weeks served 16 years as pastor's assistant, financial secretary, and educational director in two churches--First Baptist Church, St. Petersburg, and Main Street Baptist Church, Jacksonville.

He came to Ridgecrest from Houston, where he was assistant to the pastor of Second Baptist Church for six years and president of the Texas Baptist encampment at Palacios.

Credit for construction supervision of all buildings since 1950 goes to Weeks. Under Weeks' direction, Ridgecrest has grown from 1,200 to 2,000 acres. The annual attendance has increased by 15,000 and the value of the properties has been multiplied over four times.

A trustee of the North Carolina Symphony, he is also president of the Black Mountain Lion's Club.

The people of Black Mountain are not surprised that the couple are staying there. "After all," as Weeks puts it, "when you live in a community for 17 years, it kind of becomes a part of you, and you become a part of it."