

U.S. woman is world's longest-serving church organist

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MOSS POINT, Miss. (RNS) — For the past 69 years, Ida Mae Cumbest has been the pianist and organist at Caswell Springs United Methodist Church — a tenure that qualifies her as the world's longest-serving church organist.

Cumbest has played at Caswell since 1942, which prompted her son, Mark, to contact the London-based Guinness World Records in hopes of honoring his mother for her 90th birthday.

After reviewing the collected documentation, Guinness on May 11 issued a certificate that states, in part: “The longest tenure as a church pianist and organist is 69 years, achieved by Ida Mae Cumbest (U.S.), at the Caswell Springs United Methodist Church.”

“It is kind of unbelievable,” Ida Mae Cumbest said. “It is such an honor to be able to experience that. It is wonderful and worth what little effort I feel like I put forth to get that recognition.”

Mark Cumbest, who calculates that his mother has played in excess of 10,000 services, said the idea about the world record started as his mother's 90th birthday approached.

“I got to thinking — 69 years — I don't know anybody that has any kind of vocation for as long, that has been doing anything for 69 years on a regular basis,” he said.

Ida Mae Cumbest has some advice on being good at what she does: “I think to enjoy it,” she said, “and not get sold on yourself, and then do it for the Lord.”

— *Harlan Kirgan/The Mississippi Press*

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Longest tenure as a church pianist and organist: Ida Mae Cumbest sets world record

CUMBEST BLUFF, Miss., USA -- **Ida Mae Cumbest**, 90, has served as organist and pianist for the Caswell Springs United Methodist Church 69 years , setting the world record for the [Longest tenure as a church pianist and organist.](#)



Photo: Ida Mae Cumbest holds the World Record for the longest tenure as a church pianist and organist. Photo by: James Edwards Bates ([enlarge photo](#))

The Guinness world record for the longest working career for a music teacher was set by Charles Wright (USA, b. 24 May 1912) who began teaching piano privately and professionally in 1931. He continued to do so for the next 76 years until he passed away on 19 July 2007, aged 95 years 56 days.

Guinness World Records also recognized the longest career as a clarinetist was achieved by Stanley Drucker (USA, b. 4 February 1929) who performed professionally for 62 years 7 months 1 day as of 4 June 2009.

"It is kind of unbelievable," Ida Mae Cumbest said. "It is such an honor to be able to experience that. It is wonderful and worth what little effort I feel like I put forth to get that recognition."

She was first invited to play at the church in the summer of 1942, and has been playing weekends ever since. She met her husband of 62 years, Elvis, at the church and they raised their two sons in the small community that shares their name. Cumbest is one of the older families in Jackson County.

Her son Mark Cumbest said he still thrills to hear her play at services. "She does a great job," he said.

"She says she is no accomplished musician, but some people would argue with that."

"I thought, this has got to be a record -- 69 years of doing anything," Mark said. Documenting his mother's work involved witnesses,

notarized sworn statements, videos, pictures and a copy of her church membership from the 1940s.

The record-holder is married to Elvis Cumbest. They have two sons, Mark and Brent, and four grandchildren.

Her advice on keys to being good at what she does? "I think to enjoy it," she said, "and not get sold on yourself, and then do it for the Lord."