

Editor's Note

Rebuilding and restoring

A story of amazing people doing amazing things

BY BILL WAGNON

The third anniversary came and went much like the first two, with little or no fanfare. It has been over three years now since the foolish actions of three young men impacted the lives of so many others, and permanently scarred their own.

On two separate days in February 2006, nine rural Alabama churches were purposely set on fire. The damage ranged from minor to destroyed. A month later, on March 8, two Birmingham-Southern students and one UAB student were arrested for conspiracy and arson.

As I drove to work at 2 a.m. that March 8 morning, I could think of no good that could come from such a situation, still reeling from the shock of the phone call from a colleague to alert me to the impending arrests. It was a tragic situation—for the churches and their congregations; for the three young men, and especially their unknowing families; for the college.

But out of something oh so very bad, came something oh so very good, if not amazing.

Before that long day was over, media outlets from around the country converged on the Birmingham-Southern campus to see from where this evil had come. The college's response was swift, and simple. It was not contrived, but from the institution's heart and soul. At a late afternoon press conference carried live by several national TV outlets, President Pollick told the world that "Birmingham-Southern will rebuild those churches." This was exactly what the college was all about, and now the world was seeing that firsthand—Birmingham-Southern is a special place that does amazing things with amazing people.

Over the next three months, gifts of money and supplies and offers to volunteer came in from all over the country—from alumni, from friends, from people who previously had never heard of Birmingham-Southern. By July 2006, the Alabama Churches Rebuilding and Restoration Fund had topped \$370,000, and faculty, staff, and alumni began hand-delivering checks to the nine churches spread over four rural counties.

In January earlier this year, almost three years after it was literally burned to the ground, construction began on a *new* Ashby Baptist Church in Brierfield in Bibb County, Alabama. It will be the final church to either be rebuilt or restored. The eight other congregations are now worshipping in either new or rebuilt churches.

It is a truly amazing story.

So, too, is the story of the forward momentum of Birmingham-Southern that began with the college's Plan for Growth in 2006 and continues today with another near record first-year student enrollment expected this fall, an Urban Environmental Park scheduled to open in early August, a record-setting Alumni Reunion/Homecoming celebration last November, the establishment of 23 new alumni chapters since December for a total of 33 nationwide, Phase I of a comprehensive campaign that may very well have surpassed its \$50 million goal by the time you read this (and well ahead of schedule) while we experience the worst economy of our times, and more.

We continue to bring you news of this momentum in the pages of *'Southern* magazine, and we hope you enjoy our feature in this issue on the research efforts—often collaborative—of students and faculty, and of alumni researchers who are changing our world for the better.

These are, after all, amazing people doing amazing things, and we enjoy bringing you their stories.



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