

From the Ground Up

July dedication celebrates the legacy of Floyd and Frances Beard

By Trisha Vaughn

“Everybody else played baseball. We built a camp,” Dan Beard said to me on his recent visit to Stan Colley’s week.

But this wasn’t just any ordinary visit, and this definitely wasn’t your average visitor. It was a reunion of many dimensions – a multi-generational celebration of the impact one couple’s generosity can have on the lives of thousands of people. Naming the paths to the new cabin sites after Floyd and Frances Beard is a small token of gratitude for their philanthropy, love for people, and hope for what the church can be.

Since 1959, WKYC has been living out its mission of *building strong Christians*, but it didn’t begin at 301 Youth Camp Road. In fact, WKYC first met in Dawson Springs at the same facility used by the 4-H Club. The Board of Directors had a vision for a place that campers could call their home away from home permanently. Floyd and Frances Beard rose to the occasion by donating their Crittenden County property to WKYC in the early 1960s. They saw a need, and they met it.

It started with a chance meeting that would deeply impact generations to come: Frances, the band director for the local school at the time, bumped into Floyd in the produce section of the grocery store he managed. The rest, as they say, is history. Floyd was a Crittenden native and later purchased the camp property with the inheritance Frances had received from her own family. In fact, WKYC sits right next to the property where Floyd was raised. Shortly after purchasing the property, they gave it away.

“We like to joke that daddy gave away our inheritance,” Nancy Beard said of her father. “They would have given anybody anything. But this – WKYC - is our inheritance. We’re glad they did it. It’s a nice remembrance for everyone, and it’s nice to see their memory living on through this place in the way it is thriving.”

Floyd and Frances’ children, Nancy, Dan, Francie, Allan, and the late William Beard, all felt the same way about the gift: it’s a blessing with even greater returns than if they had inherited the property for themselves. Their lives are richer and fuller for having cultivated the WKYC experience.

“The example they left for us - that they were very generous people - is what speaks loads to me. My parents are not wealthy people. They did it because they wanted to do it. They wanted more people to have the opportunity to be out in nature, learn about the Lord. That’s the thing I learned the most from them - generosity and kindness. I’m very proud of my parents and what they did. What they taught us was better than any material inheritance... They taught about the true meaning of giving,” reflected Francie.

What's not as well-known: the amount of time the Beard family put into transforming the land into a camp. Once school let out on Friday afternoons, the Beards would pack up and head to WKYC to work. "It's where I learned how to drive. Daddy would work on the well and need a tool, so I'd drive up to fetch it for him," said Dan. Even William's Bassett Hound, Snoopy, would spend his weekends there. William and Snoopy loved WKYC so much that it was only fitting for William to bury Snoopy down by the creek. And the trees behind the caretaker home and cafeteria? Those were all planted by Dan, Nancy, Francie, and their cousin Carolyn.

The WKYC programming wasn't the only thing brought over from the Dawson Springs location: Mad Myrtle decided to follow, too. Back at the 4-H camp ground, Mad Myrtle was the Lady of the Lake. Legend has it that her pets were black panthers! As the story goes, she didn't want to be left behind once WKYC moved (who could blame her?), so she took up her new residence in an abandoned cabin built in the early 40s. That cabin came to be known as Mad Myrtle's cabin, and campers still take hikes there to this day.

When Floyd and Frances weren't building out the camp, they were fundraising for the newly-established non-profit. "WKYC was the connective tissue for churches in the region," said Dan. "It was like a spokes and wheel model." Camp was at the center and it brought the churches from the periphery in their own counties and towns together for a purpose that impacted the entire region in a unique way.

People from all over united to get WKYC off the ground and make it self-sustaining: Roy Lee from Evansville, IN; Doug and Arlene Brown from Mayfield, KY; Jim Cannon of Paducah, KY; Les Murdock, who donated all of the lumber; and many more assembled their talents and resources to build something wonderful. Many weekends were spent taking care of the campgrounds, and many Sunday nights were spent visiting churches and casting a vision for what camp could become for the children: a place where congregations, leaders, directors, and staff could come together to *build strong Christians*.

When you're trying to get something off the ground and grow it into a sustainable organization, there's a lot of risk involved, and a lot of opportunity for things to not work out. Floyd and Frances "...were persistent. They weren't going to give up," remembered Dan.

We're so thankful they didn't.