

Wendell Presley at 90: Not even close to slowing down

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He's the attendant at the Silver Point Recycling Center, grows sweet potatoes, leads the music ministry at his church and hunts rabbits nearly every week with the AKC-registered beagles he breeds, raises and trains.

Not bad for a 90-year-old.

Wendell Presley's friends and family will celebrate his nine-decade milestone with a community celebration for him on Sunday, Jan. 13, after morning services (about 12:30 p.m.) at Silver Point Baptist Church. Everyone who knows him is invited to attend. Presley grew up in the Martin's Creek area near Bloomington Springs and farmed there until 1946, when he moved to Silver Point and worked for Lowe Livestock.

"Those were three and a half of the best years of my life, because I got to work outside," said Presley.

"He's a true outdoorsman," added Presley's daughter, Vera Burgess.

When Lowe Livestock sold out, Presley went to work for Lowe Furniture, then worked at Cold Hollow Boat Dock and People's Stockyard, was a school bus driver for 14 years at Baxter Elementary and worked part-time for 16 years at Whitson Funeral Home.

Now he works as attendant at the Silver Point Recycling Center, a job he has held for seven years and "enjoys more than anything."

His favorite spare-time pursuit is running beagle dogs in rabbit hunts with his friends.

"I run 'em when I can, me and Leo Brown and Tom Robison and Kenneth Stockton and some others," said Presley.

He also helps Burgess and her husband, Kenneth, farm their half-acre garden.

"His pride and joy is his sweet potato ridge," said Burgess.

He's been the music minister for 55 years at Silver Point Baptist Church and plans to lead at least some of the singing at the "shindig" his friends are hosting for him next Sunday.

"I love my church," said Presley.

He and his late wife, Eliza, raised 15 foster children together in addition to Burgess, their only child by birth. Now, Presley loves spending time with his grandson, three great-grandchildren and great-great-granddaughter.

He's grown 65 tobacco crops, the last when he was 85.

"I started plowing when I could hold a mule between the corn rows," he laughed.

Where does Presley get the energy for his many pursuits?

"I'm fed well -- I cook my breakfast, and that's about all the cooking I do," said Presley. "My daughter lives hollerin' distance from me, and she threshes the food."

"And he really eats, too!" added Burgess.

Presley is still as sharp as a tack mentally, too.

"When we forget something, or someone's name, I say, 'Call Daddy, he'll know.' He usually remembers more than I do," said Burgess.

Presley shared his secret to living a long, happy life: "I've lived a clean life, a Christian life, and I have a lot of friends."

And those friends think very highly of Presley.

"He's an awful fine fellow, a good citizen," said Herschel Riddle, who sang with Presley for years in nursing homes. "He's never in trouble, and he always helps his neighbors."

"Part of what keeps him going so strong is his ability not to give up," said Leo Brown, who has hunted with Presley for many years and went to school with him at Free Union in the Martin's Creek Community. "You just don't find anybody better. And he's always been known to keep good mules," he added.

"He's always calling people his 'children,'" said Glenna Vincent, who goes to church with Presley. "He says we have to be children, because since he's 90, we're all younger than him."

He may be older than most people he knows, but at 90, it appears Wendell Presley has mastered the art of remaining young at heart.

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