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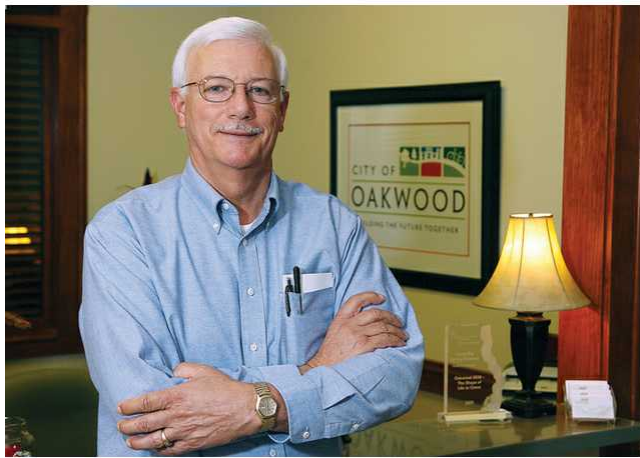
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Life's labor for Oakwood mayor

Scroggs plans to add another four years to his 35-plus in office



Oakwood Mayor Lamar Scroggs is running unopposed. At the end of the next term, he will have served in the post for 40 years.

OAKWOOD — Lamar Scroggs knows the value of hard work.

He learned it early, growing up in a family that sharecropped cotton and corn. His father drove a school bus, but it was no matter — he walked home from school.

"We'd come home at lunch time from school and we'd be in the fields working by the time he got in off the bus route," Scroggs said.

Now 68, Scroggs has transferred that passion for labor into politics. Come Tuesday, he faces no opposition in seeking yet another four-year term as mayor. When

this next term is over, he will have served 40 years in that post.

And there have been changes aplenty in this South Hall city.

When Scroggs first took the helm, the city had 200 residents, mainly scattered around the narrow two-lane streets that cross one another in the old part of town — the section that faces the railroad tracks.

Shopping centers and four-lane roads — and now six lanes in one stretch, with the completion of a nearby \$78 million Georgia Department of Transportation project — have replaced pastures and fishing holes.

"We went from real small to medium-small, I guess you could say," said the mayor during an interview last week at City Hall. "We've had several crossroads that we've crossed."

When he first became mayor, a group of residents talked about progress, or the lack thereof, at town-hall meetings.

"I said, 'Do we want to move forward or do we want to sit here? If we're going to sit here, I don't want any part of it. But if we're going to move forward, that's what we'll do,'" Scroggs said.

"And that's what we've done. ... We've succeeded in pretty much everything we've set out to do."

Scroggs added: "There's failures along the way, but then you back up and regroup. You have a good city council, good Christian people around you. You surround yourself with a good staff — people who do the job while you're gone."

The white-haired mayor with a thin salt-and-pepper mustache pauses for a bit as he tries to remember some dates and details, including just what prompted his seeking public office in the first place.

"I can't recall what all the issues were," he said. "There were things happening like garbage pickup, police, things like that. The drug problems were beginning to flourish back then. There were things we had to do ... that weren't being provided in other ways."

The development of Mundy Mill Road, particularly providing sewer access through an \$800,000 federal grant that required a \$200,000 match, was key to Oakwood's future.

Former Rep. Ed Jenkins used to stop at the Hardee's restaurant, which along with Pizza Hut were the city's only eateries.

"We'd meet and eat a biscuit over there," Scroggs said.

Mundy Mill Road, once a two-lane country road, now is four lanes most of the way between McEver Road and Atlanta Highway. The DOT widened it to six lanes around Interstate 985.

"I remember when Interstate 85 used to dead-end around Suwanee," Scroggs recalled. "Then other roads came along."

The DOT project also involved widening part of Atlanta Highway to four lanes and the construction of part of the four-lane Thurmon Tanner Parkway.

Now under construction is the final phase of Thurmon Tanner, a four-lane segment between Plainview and Mundy Mill roads.

The \$9.1 million project is projected to be completed by December 2010.

Thurmon Tanner has been built in four links. When completed, the parkway will run between Atlanta Highway at Exit 17 to Phil Niekro Boulevard in Flowery Branch.

Speaking from Oakwood City Hall on Tuesday morning, former DOT District Engineer Russell McMurry said he believes the road improvements are "really going to shape the growth and face of this community for a long time," he said.

"... It will be interesting to see in the next 20 years how things will (develop)."

Also during Scroggs' watch, the city has developed Oakwood 2030, a set of plans that lay out a vision of how the city might look by that year.

The plan affects 253 acres around the city center. It includes construction of multiuse and commercial buildings on large chunks of now-vacant land throughout the city, as well as redevelopment of other, older parts of town.

Highlights of the plan include an amphitheater, a multistory City Hall and a commuter rail station that would sit along the railroad tracks running through the heart of the town. It also features three miles of connecting trails, parks and green spaces.

"We have a lot of plans, we have a lot of ambitions," Scroggs said. "... And if the good Lord's willing, in the next four years, you're going to see some of the things happen that we've planned for."

One of the other things Scroggs is most proud of is the city's commercial and industrial development.

City Manager Stan Brown has said that the city has seen an 11 percent increase in the tax digest, or list of taxable properties, and the percentage of commercial properties versus residential has increased to 81 percent from 76 percent.

The city got a boost several years ago with the development of an industrial park off McEver Road at H.F. Reed Industrial Parkway.

"That was a real accomplishment for us," Scroggs said. "That was a big piece of property lying there."

As for his own future politically, he isn't so sure.

He said he has mulled retirement, "but I don't know," the mayor said, chuckling a bit. "I don't know what the Lord has in store for me. I don't know."

At least four more years are certain.

"Well, we're headed that way," Scroggs said