

Talley turns 90 after 65 years in Salvation Army

By **BLAIR HARRISON**
Staff Writer

MOUNT AIRY — Soon to be 90, Ethel Talley dedicated her life for 65 years — and counting — to the Salvation Army.

Talley, of 230 Orchard St., Mount Airy, turns 90 on Aug. 15, and she still visits rest homes, beats the bass drum, and so more.

"I have a lot of reasons why I have stayed in the Salvation Army," said Talley. "The pretty music, pretty singing and preachings of the Bible. The main reason is that the Salvation Army is so kind and giving, we had many people who have accepted the lord through

coming to the Salvation Army."

The Salvation Army, whose motto is "Soap, Soup and Salvation," began 175 years ago in London, England, by William

Booth with people ridiculing them and making fun of them. Now, it is a place for people to go when they are hurting and need guidance, or are bad off.

When it started here in Surry County, it began out in a little building on Oak

Street with a chance to help people.

"When I started, I was 25-

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Ethel Talley

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years old," said Talley. "When I retired, I began volunteering my time, so I still continued to work there."

Talley, who claims she has never had a headache, the flu, or a flu shot, and has only been having trouble walking just a couple of years back, walked 161 miles a month when she was 81-years old.

"I walked on the track behind Mount Airy High School, I loved it," said Talley.

For her birthday, Talley said that she just wants to be with her family at home and she has no set plans. She said that she will be going to a family reunion two weeks before her birthday.

Talley, who has won several awards for the Salvation Army, is going to be on WSYD 1300AM with Debbie Cochran on Monday at 8:40 a.m., and will speak at the Salvation Army Church on S. South Street at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

Local woman stays young by giving back

T.J. ROYAL
STAFF REPORTER

Less than a week before her 93rd birthday, Ethel Talley waltzed down the hallway at Surry Community Nursing Center, kicking along the way like a youthful adolescent.

She marches forward with her wheelchair, throwing caution to the wind.

"I'd hate to be in a race with her," her friend Mary Ellen Midkiff said about Talley's exuberance. "She's something else."

Talley managed all these years without a driver's license. Besides, it was just 12 years ago that she walked more than 150 miles to Mount Airy High School. If that wasn't enough, she tacked on another 90 miles the following year.

Born in 1914 when Woodrow Wilson was president and on the eve of World War I, never got past the 6th grade. But she is an authority on the Bible, quoting whole pages by memory.

"The Psalms are easy to remember, some of the Proverbs too," she said.

Talley said that of the whole pages she can memorize, "the Psalms are easy to remember, some of the Proverbs too."

Talley credits all the gifts in her life, her family, her wits and her health, to God. And many of her friends are drawn to her unique personality and eccentricities. When one of her neighbors recently noted that passersby could see through her front windows, Talley said that she didn't mind, adding that was "so I could see 'em right back and call the police," she quipped.

Always feeling a sense of public service, Talley began working for The Salvation Army and "God." Along the way, she taught Sunday school and managed the Salvation Army thrift store.

Deborah Cochran is one of Talley's best friends. Talley, Cochran said, was a fixture at the Salvation Army's sidewalk sermons. It wasn't unusual for Talley to beat a drum while the pastor preached for lost souls.

Talley's selfless devotion to humanity is almost legendary in

these parts. Barbara Wilcox recalls how Talley delivered towels to a low-income family. But Talley never wanted credit for her deeds, Wilcox said, preferring that her good deeds remain "discreet."

"There's no telling what she has given away in her life," Cochran said. "She has given her time, she was there every time the (Salvation Army's)

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Ethel Talley

door opened, all the time. If she saw someone who had a need, if it was clothes, she'd give them clothes."

When the nursing home began a ministry, Talley was there, always pitching in, ready and waiting to help.

"I love to work, wish I could be at home with my flowers and things, cooking home-made rolls, pound cakes," Talley said. "But every time I think about going home, there's someone I can talk to about God's love."

Cochran sums up Talley's selfless human spirit by quoting the biblical verse Luke 6:38 "give and it shall be given unto you."

Though Talley isn't the kind of person who will boast of her accomplishments, others are compelled to boast of her compassion and devotion to the less fortunate. It's not uncommon for Talley to fork over quarters for Bingo to the other residents' grandchildren.

Cochran believes that Talley's influence on others will be remembered for several generations.

"Everyone in life should have a Mrs. Talley," she said.

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Ethel Talley, right, recently celebrated her 93rd birthday, but friends say she's going strong.