

## **Mr. Harold Gene Black to serve as Grand Marshall for 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Cowan Christmas Parade: “A Gift That Keeps on Giving”**

By L. Jarod Pearson

The Cowan Christmas Parade, at 53 years, is one of Tennessee’s oldest annual parades. The Grand Marshall for this year’s parade is Mr. Howard “Gene” Black who, at age 90, is one of Cowan’s oldest residents. Mr. Black’s connection to the Cowan Parade and the community at large is part of what inspired the theme “A Gift That Keeps on Giving”.

Gene and his wife Kathleen moved to Cowan in 1990 and took a huge interest in the town from the start. The Black’s joined Cowan Lions Club and then took a leading role in the Cowan Christmas Parade. Gene and Kathleen adopted the concessions stand as one of their primary projects.

Kathleen remembers waking up before dawn on parade day and going with Gene to prepare breakfast sandwiches to sell throughout the morning. Gene would service and start the equipment and then work the crowd to generate sales. Proceeds from the concessions stand advanced the Lions Club effort to support and assist the visually disabled.

Gene devoted many days and many hours for the Lions Club doing vision testing for kids in area grade schools. The Lions Club also helped children locally and globally receive corrective lenses at no cost or at minimal cost. Gene knew of several local children who received glasses thanks in part to funds he and Kathleen helped raise at the Cowan Parade.

While the Lions Club kept them busy during the day, Gene, his wife, and their daughter Alice spent countless evenings helping individuals and families fight alcoholism and heal from its harmful effects. Gene took a strong personal interest in helping individuals overcome the disease and make better life decisions. He visited the two local hospitals many times, and sometimes in the middle of the night, to offer prayers and support for patients suffering with painful addiction.

Gene has also shared a lifelong devotion to the life and ministry of Episcopal Church in the greater Sewanee area. As a native of Sherwood, he spent his childhood working the famous English garden at the Epiphany Mission while also working as an acolyte during Sunday services.

The Black’s transferred to St. Agnes’ Church after their move to Cowan and the timing could not have been better. In the late 1980’s the Diocese of Tennessee had St. Agnes’ Church under review for possible closure as the congregation had dwindled to only about five members. The low attendance and the threat of closure did not discourage the Black’s as they immediately got to work helping St. Agnes’ grow and become vibrant again. The town of Cowan could have lost its historic Episcopal church without help from the Black’s at a critical time.

Gene served 17 years as the senior churchwarden at St. Agnes', in which time the congregation grew nearly threefold. Although he retired from the churchwarden position in 2010, he has not retired from being a devoted member. He still shows up on the church property at various times to inspect brassware, candles, vestments, shrubbery, equipment, and anything else that may need cleaning or fixing.

Gene has served the Cowan community in other ways in recent years. He was a docent for the Smithsonian Exhibition at Cowan Center for the Arts in 2012 and he supports the Sewanee Summer Music Festival annual concert in Cowan.

When the Parade Committee decided to name Harold Gene Black the Grand Marshall for this year's parade, the members had no trouble choosing a theme. Mr. Black's presence in Cowan is "A Gift That Keeps on Giving".

This year's theme also makes us mindful of other residents who are cheerful givers, and we are mindful of the spirit of giving that we share as citizens of the United States of America. The Year 2017 has met many challenges with wildfires, flooding, hurricanes, and other disasters that have tested our strength and resolve. Yet, through cheerful giving and good citizenship, we pull through and carry on.

We want the 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Christmas Parade to inspire all of us to be cheerful givers of our time, talent, and resources in 2018 and beyond.



Harold Gene Black and Kathleen Black  
Cowan, Tenn.