

BEST PLACES TO LIVE IN RURAL AMERICA: A new look to our annual list

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**The Strength Of
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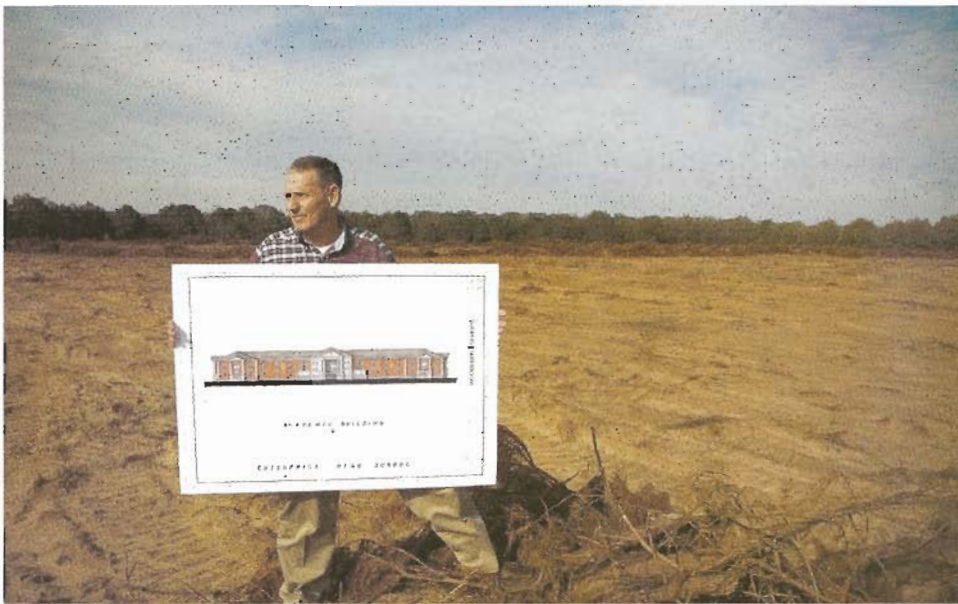
Holding On To Farm LIFE

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Like all farmers, the Kings
are coping with change.

PHOTOS: DEBRA FERGUSON

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Bob Tomberlin, an Enterprise school administrator, stands at the new high school site.



Enterprise's statue shows appreciation for the bug that changed its economy.

8 COFFEE COUNTY ALABAMA

If you've ever been through Enterprise, Ala., you probably saw one of the strangest statues in the U.S. Smack in the middle of a busy intersection downtown stands a woman holding up a large insect.

The statue is a tribute to the boll weevil, the insect that in the early 1900s all but destroyed cotton, which at the time was Coffee County's big moneymaker.

The arrival of the boll weevil forced the county to look at other ways to make its economy grow, and today you'll find a healthy base of small businesses. The statue was the town's way of saying, "Thank you, boll weevil, for forcing us to become diversified."

Strange statue aside, this county has a lot more going for it. It's called community. If you want an example of just how good it is, ask people here about March 1, 2007.

Storm sirens had been going off all morning in Enterprise that day. Students at Enterprise High School and the connecting Hillcrest Elementary School had spent several hours in the buildings' safest areas—the hallways.

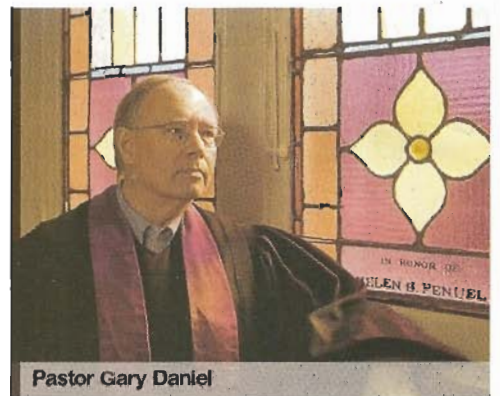
Shortly after 1 p.m., a tornado touched down, destroyed the high school and killed eight of its students. Photos of the aftermath will make you wonder why it didn't kill 100 or more. But the storm isn't the story. The people are.

Before the wind quit blowing, people from all over rushed to the scene. Doctors and nurses from the nearby hospital ran to the schools—driving was impossible with all the cars and lines down—and found more than 200 students injured. Soldiers from nearby military base Fort Rucker flew helicopters to take the wounded to hospitals. One man—and to this day school officials don't know who he was—showed up with a jack and began lifting the heavy debris off students.

A year after the disaster, the community continues to pull together—to grieve, support one another, build and repair houses, and raise money to build new schools. "The eight students became children of the community in a sense," says Gary Daniel, pastor of First United Methodist Church. Daniel is one of the leaders of the Recovery Organization of Coffee County (ROCC), a nonprofit group to help people in the recovery process.

Enterprise is about to build a new elementary school at the same site and a new high school on 132 acres it bought from a nearby landowner, John G. Ralls. Ralls sold the land at fair market value. Then, he donated \$600,000 back to the school.

—Story and photos by Joe Link



Pastor Gary Daniel

The community still needs money to help rebuild. If you want to contact ROCC to learn more, the number is 334-347-1011.

LAND PRICES

Some recent land sales in Coffee County:

50 acres with home, pond, buildings;
\$225,000 or \$4,500 per acre

216 acres with ponds and pastures;
\$2,000,000 or \$9,259 per acre

155 acres pasture,
forage, trees; \$527,000
or \$3,400 per acre

Population Density:
67.44 per sq. mi.
Average Tract Size:
25.72 acres

