

Big Top Revival offers big hope, fills 40,000 seats

An August Friday night in the small town of Burnsville, just about 40 minutes north of Asheville, means one thing – high school football. The North Buncombe Blackhawks had traveled to Mountain Heritage for the first game of the season.

So no one should be surprised to hear that every seat was filled, except those seats weren't at the high school football stadium. They were under a big white tent just off Highway 19 headed into town.

The people under the big top hadn't come to see the circus, but to find God in an old fashion tent meeting complete with sawdust covering the ground under the tent and the heat of an August evening to greet them as they sat down in the metal folding chairs that filled the tent.

What would make more than 2,300 come out on what was supposed to be the last night of a three-week crusade, where over the past few weeks somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 people have come out to sit in a hot tent during the dog days of summer to hear the Rev. Ralph Sexton, Jr. preach the "Word" straight with no apologies.

In a word – "Revival!"

The meetings have apparently have not disappointed the more than 2,000 that have turned out every night to listen to old time singing and preaching the way mountain people heard it in years gone by.

This night Sexton used the latest technology to present his message, as he stepped onto the platform; workers brought a large screen onto



The crowd.

the stage while other workers prepared a computer and project.

Soon the lights were turned down, but with the meeting taken place in the middle of a corn field, the tent got very dark. "We are watching the same Egore' that Romans did, but we're doing it in the Lazy-boy while we eat popcorn," Sexton told the audience, as pictures from horror movies were shown on the big screen.

Accompanying the pictures were images of the pop-culture assault on the moral values taught in the Bible.

To end his twenty-five minute sermon, Rev. Sexton used an emotional 911 call from a six year-old boy, who had just witnessed his dad kill his grandmother, his own mother and then witnessed his dad commit suicide. The boy then says there is blood all over the walls and tearfully asks the 911 operator, "Who is going to take care of us?"

All the operator can reply is, "Oh, God!"

More than a 150 people bowed down in the sawdust in front of the platform as Dr. Sexton gave the invitational. Dr. Sexton, who is senior pastor at Trinity Baptist Church in Asheville, has been holding these tent crusades since 1983. He told the *Tribune* he usually held two or three every year since then.

In the last two nights of the meeting alone, more than 100 professions of faith had been made under the big top.

"For that many people to come that many nights, I am nothing short of astonished!" said Sexton.

Dr. Sexton said this is his first rural meeting, as he usually holds the crusades near a big city. "It in the middle corn field," said Sexton, "This is my field of dreams!"

As of press time, the meetings are continuing on a night-to-night basis. To find out more, call 254-2187.

Editor's note: This revival has been webcast and has received sign-ins from all 50 states and Iraq.

This report filed by Clint Parker for the Tribune.



Out of a corn field a giant tent arises.

music on main



Dr. Ralph Sexton before the meeting began.

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