

Dr. Fenton Peters  
“A Man for All Seasons”

Presented by Darlene Comish  
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I chose Dr. Fenton Peters because he represents a true individual that has lived his life serving God and his community. Dr. Peters exemplifies compassion, honesty, trustworthiness, and commitment to all the endeavors in his life. He is a true man for all seasons, because his journey through life has seen many seasons and many changes.

Born July 10, 1935, Dr. Peters has lived 73 years and stated he has seen 72 of those years as a resident of Starkville, MS. He has traveled many places in his life, but calls Starkville his home. Dr. Peters is married to the former Maggie Malone of Crawford. He married her on his birthday, July 10, 1965. They have two sons, Pellum and Alton.

Dr. Peters attended school in Oktibbeha County graduating from a Dual School System, which was named Oktibbeha Training School. The school was not a reformatory school, it was just the name given at that time. After graduation, Dr. Peters attended Rust College in Holly Springs, MS. During this time, Dr. Peters received a choir scholarship. With this scholarship, he was part of a acapella choir. The school was on a quarter term system, so the choir practiced in the summer and traveled from September to December. He traveled to the Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa and other places, playing in different places each night. According to Dr. Peters he would not trade this experience for any thing in the world. This allowed him to travel as well as meet people from many different places.

Dr. Peters received his Masters and Doctoral degrees from Mississippi State University. Upon graduating college Dr. Peters got a teaching position at Henderson

School in the Starkville School District. With this position, he taught as well as coached for nine years.

In 1964, Dr. Peters entered into administration by becoming Assistant Principal and Choir Director at Henderson. In 1968, he became Principal of Henderson. In 1970, Henderson Elementary became Henderson Junior High. At this time the schools became desegregated. As principal, Dr. Peters commented, the transition to desegregated schools took place without too much fanfare because the administration and teachers had prepared for the worse. The only public display was a march that took place downtown where two black women were hit with gun butts in the face by the Mississippi Highway Patrol. One of the women had her teeth knocked out, while the other still carries the knot on her head from the incident.

Dr. Peters and his family received threats during the first year of the transition. His tires on his truck were repeatedly slashed and phone calls came often. One call Dr. Peters wife Maggie received came when he was away from the house on an errand. The caller was a white male who stated that he had Dr. Peters and was holding him and would kill him if she did not come up with \$5000. Mrs. Peters told the man, "Go ahead and kill him, we don't have that kind of money." Fortunately for Dr. Peters, the call turned out to be a scam. There was real danger that occurred during this time at the Peters family home. The mailbox at the home was bombed twice. The first time it was bombed, the Sheriff office was called and Sheriff Dolph Bryant came out to assess the situation. The Sheriff at the time assumed the mailbox was blown up by a cherry bomb. Well, when it happened again two weeks later the Sheriff's office contacted the FBI. The FBI sent an officer who investigated and told Dr. Peters that the mailbox was blown up by a stick of

dynamite. The Sheriff then assigned a deputy to help Dr. Peters stand guard over the house. According to Dr. Peters, the deputy took the west side of the house and he took the east and they stood guard for thirty two days from the hours of 9 p.m. – 2 a.m. each day. After about a year Dr Peters said things quieted down and began to run smoothly.

In 1976, Dr, Peters became the principal of Starkville High School. In 1981 he assumed the role of Director of Federal Programs for the Starkville School District. In 1983, Dr. Peters became the Assistant Superintendent of SSD. While, he was Assistant Superintendent he attended Georgia Tech to become certified in asbestos removal. He helped remove all the asbestos in the schools in the Starkville School District.

In 1986, Holly Springs called and Dr. Peters became the Superintendent of Holly Springs Public Schools. In 1991, he became a principal of a church school, Christ Missionary and Industrial School. At this time, he also became an adjunct professor for MSU teaching on the campus of Meridian. At MSU he taught the Masters program in Educational Leadership. Before he retired in 1995, Dr. Peters supervised student teachers and filled in as the Elementary School Principal for SSD.

In 1991, Dr. Peters was called on by the Oktibbeha County Supervisors to serve on the Oktibbeha County Hospital Board of Trustees. Dr. Peters is a tenured member of the Board, currently serving his fourth term for a total of over 18 years. OCH Administrator/CEO A.C. “Sonny” Kelly commented on Dr. Peters service to OCH saying, “During his years of service on our Board, Dr. Peters has served in every officer position and has given exemplary leadership and wisdom in many areas, directly contributing to the hospital’s growth and progress.” Kelly also noted that Dr. Peters has stepped forward to lobby for such statewide healthcare issues as tort reform, better

reimbursement and other such political issues OCH and all Mississippi hospitals have been faced with over the years. Because of his dedication and service to the OCH Board of Trustees and to the MS hospital community, Dr. Peters was honored as the 2008 Mississippi Hospital Association Trustee of the Year.

Dr. Peters is very active in his church, First Church of Christ (Holiness), USA. He currently serves as chairman of the deacon board, adult Sunday school teacher, van driver, Brotherhood chaplain and gospel choir director. He was also involved in spearheading the church choir's first music CD entitled, "I'm to the Highlands Bound." In 1995, Dr. Peters was inducted into the Northeast Mississippi Baptist Convention Hall of Fame.

Dr. Peters remains active in the community by serving on the Institute of Community Services Board. He also remains involved in education, meeting with professors and teachers and discussing education issues and the best way to help teachers and students in the state of Mississippi.

Dr. Peters, in 1996, was inducted into the Chamber of Commerce Education Hall of Fame. An award given to a citizen who best exemplifies service above self while performing tasks which produce a lasting impact on the community, commonly known as the GSDP's T.E. Veitch award, was given to a deserving recipient, Dr. Fenton Peters in 2007.

Dr. Peters is an invaluable asset to the Starkville Community, paving the way for change in the past and continued eternal hope for the future. Dr. Fenton Peters, a Man for All Seasons."

## References for Project

Interview with Dr. Fenton Peters and wife Maggie

Interview with OCH CEO Arthur “Sonny” Kelly

Starkville Daily News

The Mississippi Trustee, a publication of the MHA.

OCH Archives and Scrapbooks