

NO PLACE TO GO BUT UP Lake Forest's real estate tax levy to increase, Page 5

START YOUR SHOPPING Check out the best local gifts for holiday giving, Page 6



GUIDE FOR THE HOLIDAYS The North Shore's best holiday events star in 22nd Century Media's 2015 Holiday Guide, INSIDE



CELEBRATING A DECADE OF COMMUNITY NEWS AND SPIRIT



THE LAKE FOREST LEADER™

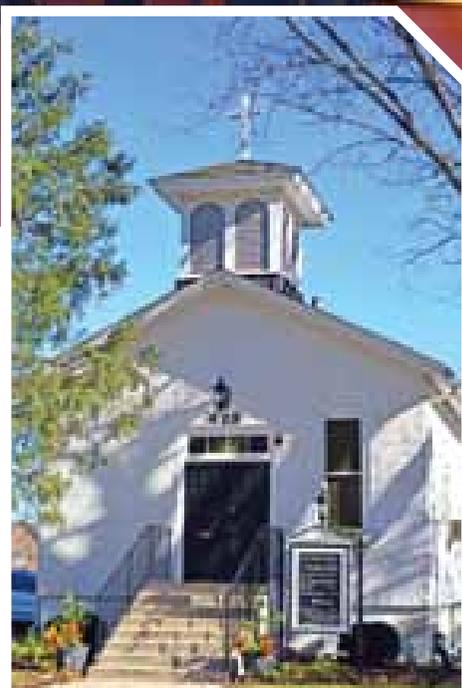
LAKE FOREST AND LAKE BLUFFS HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

LakeForestLeader.com • November 25, 2015 • Vol. 1 No. 41 • \$1

A **22ND CENTURY MEDIA** PUBLICATION



Church leaders at the First Baptist Church of Lake Forest, led by Pastor Todd Fletcher (far right), celebrate during the church's 115th anniversary celebration on Nov. 15. AIMEE MESSNER/22ND CENTURY MEDIA
INSET: The First Baptist Church of Lake Forest building has been standing at 673 Oakwood Ave. since 1888. NICKI KOETTING/22ND CENTURY MEDIA



CELEBRATING HISTORY

First Baptist Church of Lake Forest has been standing strong for 115 years, Page 3

ews COVER STORY

First Baptist Church of Lake Forest honors African-American history

NICKI KOETTING, Editor

At first glance, you might not even notice First Baptist Church of Lake Forest.

Tucked away off Deerpath Avenue next to a city public parking lot, the small white church looks like a house nestled in between a few trees.

But the church, which celebrated its 115th anniversary recently, has a long and storied history — one that is intimately intertwined with the city that its congregation calls home.

First Baptist Church has roots in early African-American history in Lake Forest. Although African-American people have lived in the city since the mid-1850s — according to a Pioneer Press article published in 2004, Lake Forest's founders were involved in the Underground Railroad, and former slaves relocated here to work for wealthy white residents — before 1900, when the church was founded, African-Americans living in Lake Forest didn't have a Baptist church they could attend.

The Rev. Harry Knight, of Chicago, would go from home to home in Lake Forest holding services. A few of the early Christian members who attended these services were Hanna Reid, Joe Drummond, Moses Stern, W. L. Bost and S. Dent, according to information provided by the Lake Forest-Lake Bluff Historical Society.

Most of the early members came to Lake Forest from the Nazareth Baptist church in Asheville, N.C., seeking better living conditions.

Eventually, the church's members rented Haely's Hall, on the corner of Bank Lane and Westminster Avenue. More people joined

the church, until they sought out a larger, more permanent home.

This home, the church that still stands at 673 Oakwood Ave. today, was actually once a four-room school house named the West School, the property for which was acquired by the City from D.R. and Ellen H. Holt in 1888. When the school was discontinued, it became a lodge hall, until it was purchased by the members of First Baptist Church in May 1903.

The building was paid off in 1912, renovated throughout that year and the next, and completely remodeled in 1917. A baptismal pool was also installed that year.

The cornerstone of the church was placed in 1922; it has the names of deacons Charles Davis and Washington Jordan and the Rev. C.C. Caldwell, pastor of the church on it. In 1927, central electric lighting was installed at the church, and tithing was introduced as a standard church practice in 1941; a system was implemented so that finances from auxiliaries would be deposited into the main church treasury, according to church history.

First Baptist Church was granted historical landmark status in 1986.

Although First Baptist's membership was never large — it waxed and waned over the decades, but it usually had less than 100 members — in 2004, the church found itself in conflict. The church only had six members, and according to the same 2004 Pioneer Press article, those members banded together to revitalize the church and discharge its pastor at the time, the Rev. Rodney B. McCalister.

That's when First Baptist's current pastor, the Rev. Todd Fletcher, and his



Parishioners of all ages come to honor and celebrate the 115th anniversary of First Baptist Church in Lake Forest on Nov. 15. AIMÉE MESSNER/22ND CENTURY MEDIA

wife, minister Patty Fletcher, came into the picture.

Todd officially became the church's pastor in June 2005, but he first came to First Baptist when the church was in the process of searching for a new pastor, at the beginning of the year. He and Patty, who live in Zion, were members of Mt. Sinai Baptist Church in North Chicago, and, Todd said, laughing, they weren't trying to leave.

But First Baptist called and asked Todd to preach one Sunday — and then kept calling him back.

"I didn't even know what First Baptist Church of Lake Forest was," he said, laughing. "I came here on that fourth Sunday and delivered a message. ... As God would have it, the person on the fifth Sunday [who was supposed

to be preaching] couldn't make it, so they asked me. I came back the next Sunday and did that. Then they asked me, all the people have canceled [to preach] in February, can you do all of February? God placed it on my heart [to not] leave."

Ten years later, the pastor looks back on the "beautiful, challenging journey" in growing a church from six to about 80 members, who drive from as close as Lake Forest to as far as Kenosha, Wisconsin, to attend services, and is pleased.

"Watching the congregation over these 10 years — it's such a love affair, and you just appreciate and are humbled that God has used you to play a part in someone's life and to establish different ministries here,"

he said.

Over the past decade, the church started ministries serving the youth and men and women who are members of the church, as well as the homeless, the incarcerated, and those who are marginalized outside the church, Patty said, and wants to continue serving those groups.

Patty said that she has enjoyed helping the church's flock through life's challenges.

"You have to have a heart for people every day," she said. "You teach them how to walk through the Word through their lives. You're giving them the Word, transforming their lives, help them through the trials and tribulations life brings. There are people that are suffering and in need, men-

tally, physically, spiritually."

Now, as the church celebrates 115 years as the oldest Baptist church in Lake County and the only African-American church in Lake Forest, the congregation's pastor would like to look forward to the next 115 years while remembering the church's past.

"We want to be seen as God's church with a strong African-American history," Todd said. "Because no one can deny history. We would do a disservice not acknowledging the journey, acknowledging the way it began, why it began, talking about the journey of ups and downs. In the same breath, as much as we talk about where we've been, we need to talk about where we are, where we're going."