

## Interview with COL Geneva Sanders, USA Retired

**Date:** Friday, February 16, 2018

**Purpose:** Visionary Consulting Partners interviewed Colonel Geneva Sanders of the Brown Hill Baptist Church. From the thirty-two minute interview, COL Sanders talked about the history of the Church, the Church's involvement in the community and how VCP assisted the Church's needs.

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**VCP:** For those who have not heard of Brown-Hill Baptist Church, could you give us a brief description about the history of the church?

**CGS:** Well, Brown-Hill Church was started back in 1795 after the land was given to them by Sarah Combs. A lot of times, the churches in the area did not have structures, so they started their church right under an arbor bridge, and that's the first thing they did in 1795.

**VCP:** Wow!

**CGS:** Later, the church actually expanded and this church we're currently in was built in 1980. It's a small country church, and it was the center of all the activities in Bleckley County for the African American population for over 200 years. All the churches in this area grew out of Brown-Hill Baptist Church.

**VCP:** That's amazing! So, how many churches have grown from the Brown-Hill Baptist Church?

**CGS:** Well, in the area we have *St. Paul Baptist Church*, *Christian Hope Baptist Church*, *Danville Baptist Church*, and *Eastern Hills Baptist Church*. Those churches grew out of Brown Hill, and still have family members that are buried down in our Brown-Hill Baptist Church Cemetery.

**VCP:** That's amazing! I'd like to know how the church has progressed in recent times?

**CGS:** Well, when I moved back in 2003, it was actually on the decline. Our Pastor had been here for 30 years, and anytime you have a small community and an older person as Pastor, the younger people tend to move away. So, when I arrived back, we had some members who were not as attentive as they should have been. But there's always that nucleus of 30 people who seem to have things going. But the church is moving.

**VCP:** Oh?

**CGS:** We just had a youth explosion on Sunday and had a church full. The thing that draws people back to the churches in the community are the kinds of programs for the youth, the adults and the community. So, we had our Black History/ Youth Explosion event on Sunday (2.11.2018).

**VCP:** That's wonderful!

**CGS:** Also, we've added bible study, and we have quite a number of youth who attend that as well. We're trying to intertwine the bible with all things going on in the community with the school, so our black youth will be able to get reinforcements from not only the home and school, but also the Church.

**VCP:** That’s amazing. Can you talk to us a little more about the youth explosion that happened on Sunday, especially since you said it ties into Black History Month?

**CGS:** Well, we started our service with a Black History program and sung, “*Lift Every Voice and Sing*,” and each of the youth had picked out a individual from black history to do a blurb on in order to reinforce their history. The Pastor also spoke about black history, and we brought in the Emancipation Proclamation because a lot of time we forget we were freed on *January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863*. Then we went back to our youth explosion where we invited different churches in the area. To promote participation, we had praise dancing, poems, readings and singing. The church was full, the people had a great time, and it was just nice to see our young African Americans get up and not be afraid to dance to words of encouragement; to uplift, and not tear down.

**VCP:** Absolutely. I’m glad to hear Brown-Hill is engaged in the community, and I’d like to know what you hope to achieve through the community engagements you’ve done throughout the years?

**CGS:** What we hope to achieve is a place for people to come to, not only to receive spiritual feeding, but also church outreach. If you have problems and you need help, our Pastor is very big on counseling and tutoring. We have teachers on a request basis, retired educators, and also a few nurses. So our problem usually is we have one of each!

**VCP:** (laughs) There is nothing wrong with having one of each!

**CGS:** (laughs) It’s plentiful! So, the strategy is, if we can’t provide care here, I’ll go to a friend and see if they have a service we can use and they’ll come and help. That’s the good thing about being in a rural area. It’s still a place where people will help each other. Sometimes when you get in big cities, help is not as easily accessible, even though you have massive churches that provide lots of programs.

**VCP:** That’s truly amazing. How has the relationship been with Visionary Consulting Partners, and how did you get in contact with Ellie and Mike?

**CGS:** I met them when my son was in karate. He’s 29 now, but at the time he was in first grade. Ellie didn’t have Visionary at the time; I want to say she was working at Howard University. She’s always been a go-getter. I try and keep in touch with all my friends, so periodically I’ll give a buzz to see how they’re doing. She was so enthusiastic about her company and I wanted to give her words of encouragement because we all need to help each other. If you can do something for someone to brighten their day and help them out, then go for it. And that’s the kind of person I am, and that’s the kind of person Ellie is. We would meet up when I lived in Virginia and have lunch and talk about all the things she wanted to do, and I was so proud of her. And I was so glad that she wanted to do those things for individuals who have asthma and it’s like, wow, that’s amazing! I just like seeing people going forth and doing great things and at the time, she didn’t have Visionary, but we would still stay in touch and she’s always so enthusiastic, so upbeat!

**VCP:** She absolutely is! So how did Visionary contribute to Brown Hill’s continued success?

**CGS:** We were trying to get a heating and air system installed, and in fundraising, I try not to go to the same people because I don’t want to feel like I’m taking advantage. But what Ellie said was, “*Oh yes!*”

*We'll help!"* She told me we needed to submit a request of what we needed, so I typed it up myself and tried to get pictures and tried to go back and look at our history. She sent a check and I opened the envelope and I almost fell out my chair because I thought I was going to get \$25.

**VCP:** (laughs)

**CGS:** (laughs) Hey, every little bit helps! But when I opened her check and it said \$1500, I said, *"Thank you Jesus!"* (laughs) We may get heat and air in no time! So I've been putting money every month toward it, but there seems to be so many things that need to be done. I was just telling Ellie the other day that we just finished putting in some slide doors and a handicap ramp.

**VCP:** Wow, congratulations! Now, I've already asked what you hope to achieve through community engagement, but I want to do the flip side. How do you engage internally within the church as opposed to externally with the community at large? Are you the engagement champion within Brown-Hill Baptist Church?

**CGS:** Well, you know how country people are. (laughs) I moved back in 2003 and I didn't want to rush in and try to take over. So what you do is offer words of encouragement; you try to help; you try to bring some of your talents to the organization to make it run smoother. But I'm telling you, when I first returned I almost cried because my poor little church was falling in. My mother was the mother of the church at the time and said, *"We have the worst looking church in the area."* She said, *"I don't understand, I keep paying and paying and nothing is getting done!"* And so, you just try and infiltrate and see what's going on. And if you have a treasurer that can't read, yes, you may never have any money. So that was some of the problems I faced around getting the right people in the right job to help do the right things for the church, but we're getting older so we need the next generation to come in and be the support.

**VCP:** Understood...

**CGS:** That is what old time churches used to do; help us grow & get better, and help make our young people all that we need them to be. When the parents and the school couldn't do it, the church would be the extra reinforcement for them. Today we have about 25 youth at Brown Hill. If you can train them in their jobs, they're great. (laughs) It takes a little time, but they can see something's being done, and that energizes them. That's what we're trying to do with our youth. They're also conducting fundraisers because I told them they needed to set up a scholarship fund. And our church, if you're looking at steady members, probably has about 30 adults in total. And if there's really an activity - like a church anniversary - you'll have 150 people because other churches from the area come and celebrate with us.

**DR:** Understood, and thank you very much for your time this afternoon!