

NEW CELEBRITY RESIDENT

By Gary Michael Smith

In 1942, 17-year-old Hugh Smith was asked to serve as announcer for KFFA radio station in his home town of Helena, AR, beginning a 45-year career in what was then considered the prestigious field of radio broadcasting. Adding to the excitement of this offer was the fact that KFFA was the first station to play blues and jazz, beating Clarksdale by a decade. Hugh hosted the King Biscuit Time program for nearly 10 years, introducing such talents as Guitarist Joe Willie Wilkins, piano player Joe "Pinetop" Perkins, harmonica player "Sonny Boy" Williamson, drummer James "Peck" Curtis, guitarist Huston Stackhouse, and the legendary singer, songwriter, and Lucille-player B.B. King. The Blue Network, the precursor to ABC, took Hugh throughout the



country to work at numerous broadcasting venues. While on the West Coast, he worked with such notables as Johnny Weissmuller (Tarzan), Alan Ladd (Shane), and "Tom and Jerry" animator and the voice of Speedy Gonzales and Droopy Dog, Joe Price. While living in the Los Angeles area, Hugh also was a toga-clad extra in the classic film "Ben Hur." In 1951 Hugh was back in Helena where he married Polly, formerly of Indiana, PA, and they moved to Biloxi where he worked at WLOX, broadcasting nightly at the Buena Vista hotel. He

also was MC for many shows at the Gus Stevens club around this time. It was in Biloxi that his daughter, Carol, was born, but Hugh soon thereafter took another announcing job back near his hometown, but this time in Forrest City, AR, which is where his son, Gary, was born. But he always longed for the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and after nearly 20 years at Louisiana radio stations KMLB, KTIB, and KJIN/KCIL in Monroe, Thibodaux, and Houma, respectively, he retired in 1987 and remained in Thibodaux for another 10 years before moving to what they considered their true retirement home 4 blocks from the beach in Waveland, MS.

Unfortunately, being ground zero for Hurricane Katrina, Hugh and Polly lost 55-years of memories and possessions except what they had in their car. After weeks of living in a hotel in Alabama, FEMA gave them a trailer until

they could make other arrangements. Five weeks later they moved closer to home into another trailer in Picayune, but this turned into a nightmare, with a growing frequency of crime throughout the area. After months of strenuous searching, 80-year-old Hugh took his insurance money and found a place in Diamondhead. Now in their new retirement home, Hugh hopes to continue his interest in music as an organist as well as growing tropical plants and constructing his trademark garden waterfalls and fountains. He hopes to meet others in Diamondhead with similar interests.



Polly and Hugh Smith. Photograph by James Edward Bates, Sun Herald