

# Easthaven church dedicates the Haven Cross

*By Tony Martin*

*Editor*

Easthaven Church, Brookhaven, dedicated a massive cross Good Friday, March 29.

The cross is one of the newest of 14 crosses of this magnitude scattered across the state, the most recent being built in Aberdeen. Hundreds attended the formal dedication ceremony. The 150-foot-tall cross, which cost approximately \$200,000, was erected on the church's property and is visible from I-55.

Speaking at the dedication service, Jim Futral, Executive Director/Treasurer Emeritus of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, said, "I can't think of a 'gooder' place to be on Good Friday than at the foot of the cross, reflecting on the sacrifice that Jesus made for you and for me."

Pastor Hal Kitchings offered some insight into the cross and its intended ministry.

"Back in May on a Wednesday, I decided I wanted to share some thoughts with our church," Kitchings said. "I'd been at the church four or five months and wanted to share with them a little bit of my vision. I started with that very definition of vision – a mental picture of what could be fueled by the conviction of what should be.

"I shared with them and said, 'Now, y'all, this isn't concrete. This isn't anything I've necessarily run by our leadership team or whatever. These are some thoughts I just thought I'd share with you.' One of the things I shared was, wouldn't it be neat one day because of the property we have in our location to consider or look into having one of these

significant, huge crosses on our property?”

Two years ago, Kitchings was speaking at a youth retreat at North Greenwood Church, Greenwood, where Jim Phillips is pastor. At the time, what is known as the “Delta Cross” was being erected. The cross was about two-thirds completed.

“Jim said, ‘Man, I need to show you this,’” Kitchings said. “So we went to where it was being built, and he told me a little bit about how it came about.” Phillips shared some of that story during the Haven Cross dedication service.

“In the next day or two after I’d shared with the Wednesday night group, I started hearing from different people, some who were in the room and some that were not,” Kitchings said. “One individual, a leader in the church, a deacon, contacted me. He’d contacted our renovation team chairman already. We were already doing some renovations in the worship center, our parking lot, a new sign. That team was already meeting, and Kenny Goza, the chairman of the team, said, ‘I’ve seen those crosses around Mississippi, and then kind of thought, man, wouldn’t it be great if we could have one in Brookhaven somewhere here?’”

As it turned out, others in the church had been thinking the same thing. One individual, who wasn’t in the room, heard what was shared from his wife. He went to Goza and told him that if the church wanted to do this, God had put the same thing on his heart and just “let him know” what he could do.

“It was one of those ‘Experiencing God’ things where Henry Blackaby talks about finding where God is working and getting in on it,” Kitchings said. “Well, God had already been working in the hearts of some of our people and it just started rolling. It was almost like we had two projects going on, the renovation stuff and now the cross. We weren’t talking about taking this out of the church budget.”

The opportunity was given for those that wished to give

anonymously.

Kitchings and four laymen went to Greenwood to spend the day with Phillips. He shared what it would take for it to happen, and also told the group that they could expect some pushback.

God kept providing finances and excitement along the way. In the process, the church approved of the plan along with the renovation plans. "It just developed legs and took off," Kitchings said.

Rozier Construction in Greenwood, who has built other crosses in Mississippi and in other states, was retained. "Mike Rozier is a fine Christian man," Kitchings said. "He came and met with us and told us what it would take." The construction company made no profit on the cross; the cost to the church was materials only. Rozier led the closing prayer at the dedication.

"We'd wanted to have the cross up by the end of last year," Kitchings stated. "But weather and other things kept that from happening. It ended up being completed right around Easter, and that was a big deal."

Kitchings noted that not all coverage of the event was positive. For instance, WLBT, Jackson, published a story with the headline, "A pastor defends his cross."

"It's not my cross," Kitchings said. "They say things like the cross is the largest one in the state, and that's what they want to talk about. Well, that's nuts. It's stuff like that that you want to go off on, but you realize there's a risk when you do interviews that will be public."

Kitchings went on to say that many people in the community had donated to the project, some anonymously, others in memory or honor of loved ones. "There was one individual who goes to another church but shared that God had blessed him financially." That individual donated \$65,000 toward

landscaping and other needs.

Kitchings is fond of quoting 1 Corinthians 1:18, which is written at the foot of the Haven Cross:

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (ESV)