

A Great Show For All Ages Puppets...

Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

YOUR FIRST THOUGHTS MAY RANGE ANYWHERE FROM SOCK PUPPETS TO THE EXTRAVAGANZA OF JIM HENSON AND THE MUPPETS. . .

but for a church in rural Garrett County, it is a professional program featuring the many multi-faceted world of puppetry with a heart for their community. The puppet team, under the direction of Scott Weeks, coined its name S.C.W.O.T (Serving Christ With Our Talents) and has been a mainstay outreach ministry at Pleasant View Baptist Church for some 12 years now. Previously the church threw together a hodge podge group of people and used puppets occasionally at summer Vacation Bible School and pre-parade outreach at the Autumn Glory Festival in Oakland.

Once the team got off the ground, first only doing small programs for their children's department on Sunday mornings, they began to undertake larger projects. The team in its early years did go on the road to other churches in Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Virginia. In 1996, they increased their outreach to involve a larger pre-parade ministry along with the church's children's choir. Following that ministry the church saw how effective puppets were at drawing a crowd, so the team decided to do a full-fledged Christmas production at the church and invite the community. This they did with overwhelming results. They put together a multi-tiered stage of mostly black



curtain for the Christmas season of 1996, and did their first program entitled "3 Wise Men and a Baby." They invited their family and friends of the community. That year the team planned on one performance in an auditorium that seats about 300 people, and the turnout was so great that some of the people had to wait in the basement of the church, so they did a second performance about an hour and a half later that night. The next year the church did not know what to expect. Scott's dream was to have a professional program of the same caliber of Broadway or Sesame Street. He wanted to produce it to the best of his ability. That year Scott, by chance, crossed the path of a guy named Alex Flanigan. Alex was a jack-of-all-trades and could do just about anything. As Scott and Alex's friendship grew, they began catching the vision together. Scott would dream it, and Alex would help make it a reality by helping to design and build elaborate puppet stage sets.





THE PUPPETEERS – *Back row, left to right:* Kelsie Umbel, Justin Weeks, Sally Miller, Michael Welch, Sheri Weeks, and Scott Weeks. *Middle row, left to right:* Alex Flanigan, Josiah Weeks, Danielle Massey, Leesha Weeks, DJ Flanigan, and Andrew Harvey. *Front row, left to right:* Rebekah Rush, Elizabeth Rush, Katie Welch. *Puppeteers not shown:* Holly and Jason O’Brien.

It is typical to find Scott and Alex working until wee hours in the morning planning, designing, and building what gives their church the title, “the puppet church.” Ever since that time, the program has grown and flourished into something a lot of people consider an annual family Christmas tradition. People call months in advance each year to see when the performances are taking place. After the 1996 Christmas production the team has presented annual Christmas programs, with the exception of taking two years off for the birth of Scott’s two children.

These programs are not just your average puppet show, nor are they just for kids. In fact, the programs are targeted to teens and adults and contain clean adult humor. Scott’s philosophy is make it appeal to the adults and teens and kids will automatically love it. The entertainment comes with a message, a message of hope and good news. The entire church supports the puppet ministry. It is not out of the ordinary for the church to begin the re-modeling and facelift of the front of the sanctuary a month before the program. With the help of many, the multi-level set takes

up the entire 50 feet of the front of the church. The show is a professional quality full-length program featuring a multitude of high-tech and cutting edge techniques. The church presents it *free of charge* as a Christmas gift to the community. Spectators from past performances have said that the team is of Broadway caliber. You have to see it to believe it!

In addition to preparing for the Christmas program this year, the team is now preparing for their pre-parade outreach that takes place October 13 on Second Street in Oakland between the First United Bank and the Oakland Post Office during the Autumn Glory Parade. The program will start around 11:30 and will end at 12:30 to make way for the Grand Feature Parade.

In celebration of their 10th Christmas program, the team is planning on doing an encore presentation of “The Last Mailing Day Before Christmas,” one of the favorite programs for many of the team members. The performances will be given ***FREE of charge***, however seats in the church’s sanctuary are limited so please call and reserve

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your seat and receive a complimentary ticket. Last year the church scheduled 7 performances—two on Friday evening, three on Saturday, and two on Sunday. The programs filled up so quickly that the team scheduled an additional eighth performance. Because the popularity continues to grow, there has been some discussion of doing the program over two weekends. Although times have not been secured yet, it is likely the program will be the weekend of December 14, 15, and 16. Tickets usually are offered (free) after Thanksgiving each year so please visit the church website at www.pleasantviewbc.org or call the church at **301-334-8515** for the latest information.

Pleasant View Baptist Church is located approximately 2 miles south of Oakland, MD on Route 219 and is pastored by Pastor Wally Weeks. The address is 8931 Garrett Highway, Oakland, MD. You will not be disappointed, and you may find yourself coming back year after year, and bringing more and more people with you.

***Editor's Note:** I thoroughly enjoyed this show and would recommend it for everyone in your family. The performance, music, sound and mechanics were first rate. The colorful glow puppet on page 54 is about 5 feet tall, as were several of the other puppets. You cannot see it but the puppeteers have these large puppets strapped to the front of their chest, arms and legs, which is the reason they wear all black on a black stage. With the lights off in a darkened auditorium you see nothing but the glow of the puppets, due to the special lighting. Amazingly these large puppets take two people to operate, one in front with the puppet attached to them, while the other person reaches across the front person's shoulders to operate the head and mouth, (of the puppet). It is truly amazing the effect the audience sees.*