



Johnny Williamson stands with his statue of a shepherd in the front yard of his Samantha home.

STAFF PHOTOS | MICHAEL E. PALMER

Front-yard faith

Johnny Williamson's shepherd statue a testimony to his beliefs

By Markeshia Ricks
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On the hill of a sprawling, but well-manicured, lawn in Samantha sits a wooden cross, a cross-shaped flowerbed and a six and a half-foot tall glass-encased shepherd that many have said resembles Jesus.

This lawn does not belong to any of the churches along U.S. Highway 43. It is the front yard of 67-year-old retired logger Johnny Williamson.

History has shown Williamson to be an eccentric man who is not afraid to express himself.

In 1983, he purchased a full-page ad in The Tuscaloosa News to convince his wife of how much he missed her. It temporarily won her over, but she eventually became his ex-wife.

And three years ago, he became the owner of the large wooden shepherd that sits on the hill in front of his house.

"It is a solid wood statue of a shepherd, and most people say it's Jesus," Williamson said. "When you go to church, you learn Jesus called himself a good shepherd. So I could see why people who believe in Jesus

would say it's Jesus."

Williamson's son Ricky, also a logger, said it startled him when his father decided to have the statue carved.

"I never dreamed of him doing something like that," he said. "We believe in God, and the statue is a testament to that belief."

Williamson commissioned local carver Willie Logan to create the shepherd.

Logan is the carver of the wooden statue of Chief Tuskalusa on display in the Tuscaloosa Public Library.

"Mr. Williamson said he had been thinking about having a Jesus of some sort carved as a testimony," Logan said.

"I didn't know how much good would come from the statue until a man told me he passed the statue one night, saw the statue all lit up, and thought Jesus had come back. He said it scared him into thinking about whether he was ready to meet Jesus. There's no telling how many people have felt the same effect."

Most people would think twice about putting a likeness of Jesus on their front lawn, but Williamson said it

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Johnny Williamson prepares to clean his statue of a shepherd. Williamson erected the statue three years ago saying it was "unique and a good testimony of my faith."



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Johnny Williamson gives a little polish to the statue of a shepherd, which many people think represents Jesus, that stands in his front yard in a glass case.

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was something he felt compelled to do.

"Having the statue made was an idea that came to me one day," Williamson said. "I thought it was unique and a good testimony of my faith."

Some people would be more than a little concerned if a neighbor erected a six and a half-foot tall statue in a yard they practically share, but not Floyd Hughes.

Hughes said he and Williamson have been "good neighbors" for 35 years, and the fixture did not bother him.

"The statue is a piece of art. It's nice and well made. It will be something special that will last him and his family a long time, maybe 100 years or more," he said. "He's proud of the statue, and we are proud of it, too."

The structure has certainly garnered Williamson some attention.

"A lot of people from out of

town, and even some from here, will pass by and turn around and come back to look and take pictures," he said. "My son is a truck driver, and he told me the drivers would be on the radio talking about the man with the statue in the yard. It's pretty exciting."

However, he said it is the negative attention that has bothered him the most.

"One fellow stopped and said he didn't believe in idol worshippers," Williamson said. "It wasn't meant to be an idol. It's kind of like a picture of Jesus. You don't worship it, but it gets people to think and do good deeds."

Williamson said he did not erect the statue for attention.

"I didn't do this because I wanted glory," he said. "I did it to glorify the Lord."

So whether people like it or not, and whether they believe it or not, the good shepherd will continue to stand solemnly over the highway, keeping vigil over the many passersby, silently testifying one man's faith.

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