

Couple bids farewell to Jekyll Island

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Twenty three years ago, The Rev. Gene Jarrett and his wife Alice moved to Jekyll Island — in theory, at least, with plans to retire.

Of course, they did nothing of the sort. Instead, they became immersed in the community in many endeavors — so many that civic organizations and nonprofits will recognize their contributions with a community open house from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday at Goodyear Cottage in the Jekyll Island National Landmark Historic District.

As their friends will attest, people like the Jarretts become much beloved, but sadly, they are given to Jekyll only on loan. The couple will soon relocate to Johnson City, Tenn., to join two of their daughters and their families.

The Jarretts are excited about joining their daughters, but said they will miss the Jekyll Island community.

“We’re sad about leaving Jekyll,” Alice said. “It has really kept us going.”

It has indeed. Gene, 87, and Alice, 86, have maintained active, joyful lives. They got married in 1951, drawn to each other from the start through their strong faith.

“I did not go to church at all as a child,” Gene said. “I learned to be a Christian as a sophomore in high school before becoming a pastor when I was 18.”

Alice grew up in Mozambique with her missionary parents and also attended school in South Africa before returning at 16 to her family’s home in Toronto.

“That experience was the best thing for me,” Alice said, adding that she has always celebrated her life as a missionary and for so many years her work in ministry with Gene. Years ago, she became an American citizen.

They met at Greenville College in Illinois. Gene went on to receive a master’s degree at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky. His church work included parishes in Indiana and in Atlanta’s greater metropolitan area. Alice spent a number of years as a high school and seventh-grade teacher.

For many years, the Jarretts had been looking for a locale to retire to that would provide them with many opportunities to keep busy. Jekyll Island was a great fit, and they purchased a home there in 1983. Ten years later, they made the move — proverbially hitting the ground running.

Gene soon agreed to help people in Richmond Hill who were starting a new church. He spent two or three months with them until they were ready to seek a permanent minister. Around the same time, the Jekyll Island Authority hired him to work with the golf program on the island. Gene describes himself as a “cart boy” — cleaning the carts, assisting golfers during their rounds and more. He finally “retired” again about two years ago.

“It was a fun place,” Gene said. “Helping me meet people from all over the world.”

Meanwhile, Alice quickly emerged as a force of community service. Seemingly, she was everywhere — all the Red Cross blood drives and serving as an assistant poll manager for the Jekyll District of the Glynn County Board of Elections.

Alice raised funds for the United Way and spent two years on the board of the Jekyll Island Arts Association. She had key roles with the festival sales shop and also headed a knitters’ group.

For about three years, Alice served as a program chairman for the Jekyll Island Museum Association — now known as the Friends of Historic Jekyll Island.

Somehow, she and Gene found time to sing with the Jekyll Singers and on one memorable occasion, performed with the Coastal Symphony Chorus. In perhaps her favorite community project, Alice got involved with the Franklin Pond Chamber Music summer program from Atlanta that was held on Jekyll Island — helping arrange housing for participants.

“These were young people who were learning classical music,” Alice said. “That’s a dying thing in this country, and we should support it.”

The open house will be hosted by the Jekyll Island Lions Club, the Jekyll Island Citizens Association, the Jekyll Island Arts Association, the Jekyll Red Cross and the board of elections.

“All are welcome to join us as we share our memories and well-wishes with this incredible couple,” said Jekyll Island resident Vera Locascio.

The Jarretts found Jekyll Island a wonderful opportunity with a wide range of activities throughout their time in the community.

“We have had so many good experiences here,” Alice said. “We’ve had a great life and four lovely daughters. We are grateful to God with all the things that