

# Lands, Pearson & Renfro: Making a place where others want to come



The young men from Oak Ridge rekindle their friendship at UTK's Wesley Foundation.

**L**indsey Lands remembers coming to the Wesley Foundation for the first time, a few years ago, and wondering, "Why aren't the lights on?"

On a recent Sunday night, the University of Tennessee graduate visited his old friends at the Wesley Foundation. He was glad to see the place was not only well-lit, it was packed with 40 students who came for worship, dinner, and small groups.

Will Pearson, too, has noticed a revitalization in the Knoxville gathering place: "When I came here, it was a small group of people, but it's doubled or tripled on Sunday nights."

For Lands, Pearson, and the twin Renfro brothers – Blake and Trevor – the Wesley Foundation has become a place to continue friendships that began at First Oak Ridge United Methodist Church.

At age 24, Lands is older than the other three, who are all 21. But the foursome have good memories of youth activities at their home church. They laugh about stunts performed at Resurrection ("You can't print that!") as well as on youth choir trips to England, Canada, and St. Louis.

Lands has an undergraduate degree in microbiology and is applying for medical school. Blake Renfro is majoring in history and religious studies and expects to graduate in May. Trevor Renfro is majoring in communications and cinema studies and also expects to graduate in May. Both brothers are considering graduate school. Pearson is majoring in chemical engineering and expects to graduate within a couple of years.

All of them say the Rev. David Jackson helped revitalize the Foundation when he reinvigorated the residency program. Jackson

was appointed as Foundation director in June 2004.

Some Wesley Foundations have residents and some don't. The Wesley Foundation at UTK has facilities for eight residents. Lands, Pearson, and the Renfros have all lived there within the last two years.

"It's kind of cool to live in a church," says Blake Renfro, who is currently rooming with his brother at the Foundation. Residents not only have built-in duties – they rotate responsibilities for preparing dinner and maintaining the grounds – they end up taking leadership roles in the activities.

"We don't know the difference because we're always there," says Blake. "I do the music stuff."

The young men have also noticed that living on the premises boosted their personal spiritual lives, while also helping to create a homey community where non-residents want to congregate.

"College students sometimes end up getting sidetracked," says Lands. "In a big university, you're always looking for a community. For me, it was good to be surrounded by people with similar religious beliefs, to kind of keep me on the right path."

"This is a good, core group of people to be around," says Trevor Renfro. "It's a good place to just watch TV and joke around with old friends – and to meet new people, too."

"The exposure you get to religion here is akin to a year's worth anywhere else," says Pearson. "It's unavoidable, when you're surrounded by it all the time. It's given me a big sense of how important a church community is."

Keep the lights burning. ■



**Will Pearson**



**Trevor Renfro**



**Blake Renfro**



**Lindsey Lands**

## Life at the WF

**Location:** 1718 Melrose Place, Knoxville, TN 37916-3421

**Director:** Rev. David Jackson

**High attendance:** 75 at "Welcome Week" activities

**Core group:** 60 are regular participants

**Wish list:** 25 blue, hardcover, New Revised Standard Version Bibles from Cokesbury Bookstore

**Web site:** [web.utk.edu/~wesfound](http://web.utk.edu/~wesfound)

**Phone:** (865) 522-2728

