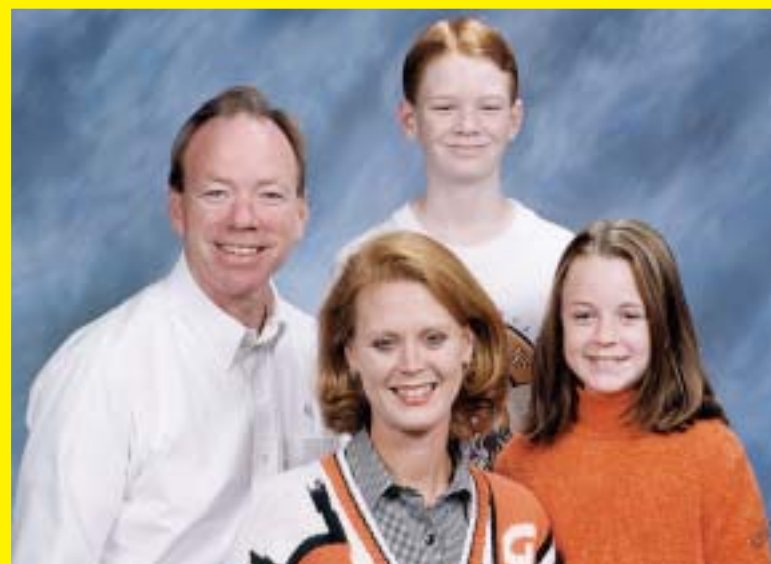


## people:

▲ **Nashville Bound?**

*The Rev. Bob Tripp & family members Kerry, Andrew, 12, & Ashley, 10*

## GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGN IS A WILD RIDE FOR TRIPP

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – The Rev. Bob Tripp is driving back from a Nashville radio station, where he spent the morning talking about state income taxes and the Gospel on a talk show. It's not the first time he's been on the radio, but it is the first time he's been on the radio as a candidate for governor.

"What can you do when the Lord puts a path before you, but to follow that path?" says Tripp from the road on his cell phone. In response to what he feels God is calling him to do, the pastor at Second UMC in Knoxville is seeking the state's Republican gubernatorial nomination.

Tripp's quest has shocked his family and acquaintances as well as parishioners, according to his wife. A political newcomer, Tripp served First UMC in Pigeon Forge before arriving at Second in 2001.

"This is a wonderful church, and we've only been here for a year," Kerry Tripp says with a sigh. "It seems like when you're comfortable, the Lord wants to stir you up and give you a new challenge. But I don't question [Bob's] call."

Tripp will serve Second UMC through the end of February; the Republican primary is in August 2002. In the meantime, Tripp is already receiving requests to speak at Holston churches about his decision to run. The candidate is a native of Brownsville, Tenn., where his family owns Tripp's Country Hams and his father is a retired minister in the Memphis Conference.

"I'm not leaving the ministry, I'm just going fishing," says Tripp, who doesn't plan to soft-pedal his faith during public appearances even though it may be a turn-off to some voters. "I will not sacrifice the Gospel. Uh-uh. No way." ■

“What can you do when the Lord puts a path before you, but to follow that path?”

—Rev. Bob Tripp

▲ **Bring on the Gingerbread:**

*Steve Wiggins recently received the White House's thanks for editing a video about Christmas decorations.*

happy holiday season, and was signed by Laura Bush.

It was no joke. Wiggins was being commended for editing a video about the White House's Christmas decorations. The video was shown continuously at the Visitors' Center throughout the holidays.

"For the first time in history, the decorations could only be viewed by invitation from the President and First Lady," explains Wiggins, a lay leader at First UMC in Knoxville. Knowing the public would be disappointed, Laura Bush proposed a 10-minute video instead. Having edited a high-rated one-hour TV show on the same topic, Wiggins had one day to put the video together – "which in our world is no time at all." He set the video to modern Christmas music.

The HGTV editor is proud of his letter, and so is his wife, who recently took it to be framed. Wiggins is married to Lori Tucker, news anchor at WATE and co-lay leader at First UMC. The church is pretty proud of Wiggins, too: The presidential letter was featured in a recent First UMC newsletter.

"This was an opportunity of a lifetime and a way to put a happy ending on a year which had seen so much tragedy," Wiggins was quoted in the newsletter. ■

## He's baaaaack:

## GRAYBEAL RESEARCHES MORRISTOWN

**MORRISTOWN, Tenn.** – The Rev. David Graybeal has just spent 13 days in a hotel, and he's ready to go home. But the Holston minister still has four days to go before completing his work in Morristown and heading back to New Jersey.

Professor emeritus at Drew University's Theological School, Graybeal spent a large part of January 2002 studying the impact of religious faith in the town where he conducted similar research in the mid-1900s. Fifty years later, Graybeal's back – along with six students from Drew who want to discover how Morristown's strong faith may have lessened since the professor wrote his dissertation in 1951.

"I thought there were many factors that might combine to change the way people understood their faith," said Graybeal, citing TVA, television, transportation and other elements of progress that typically effect change. "What's fascinating to me is that religious attitudes here continue to permeate this town."

The retired professor and his students attended worship services and met with ministers and community leaders of all denominations in the Hamblen County area. They even attended a day of Resurrection, the conference's annual youth retreat in Gatlinburg, Tenn., to observe how religion affects the area's young people.

What's Graybeal going to do when the research is complete? "Several people have asked me that," said the professor, who has yet to publish his findings. "I'm still thinking about it." ■

## Religion in Morristown: ▶

*The Rev. David Graybeal relaxes in the hotel lobby where he conducted research for 17 days.*



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## WIGGINS WINS PRAISE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

**KNOXVILLE, Tenn.** – On the day after Christmas Steve Wiggins came back to his office at Home & Garden Television to find a big, stiff envelope in his mail. At first, he thought it was a joke. Why would the White House send him a letter?

"Dear Mr. Wiggins," the letter read. "Thank you for helping produce *White House Christmas 2001*." The letter complimented Wiggins for his "quick turn-around and hard work," wished him a