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Training sessions set
for Crossover volunteers

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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ATLANTA (BP)--Training sessions for Crossover Atlanta volunteers will be Friday, June 16. Most Crossover activities will take place Saturday, June 17.

Crossover is the evangelistic thrust before the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. Volunteers will help local churches conduct a myriad of evangelistic events, from door-to-door surveys to block parties.

Training for neighborhood surveys will begin at 7 p.m. at Briarcliff Baptist Church, 3039 Briarcliff Road in Atlanta. More than 80 Atlanta area churches will participate in the door-to-door surveys, said Keith Walker, Home Mission Board associate director of personal evangelism.

In the door-to-door approach, volunteers use a survey to ask residents about their religious beliefs. The survey leads to an opportunity to witness. The training session will explain how to use the survey and other materials, Walker said.

Training for block parties and street evangelism will be at Piedmont Baptist Church, 570 Piedmont Road in Marietta. At least 30 churches will host block parties said Toby Frost, HMB associate director of mass evangelism.

Block parties typically are held on a parking lot, with free food and Christian entertainment used to draw a crowd. Volunteers will learn how to witness to people gathered for the event, Frost said. Street evangelism involves witnessing in areas with high pedestrian traffic.

To register to participate in Crossover Atlanta, call the Georgia Baptist Convention evangelism department, (404) 936-5233.

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Jim Henry notes revival,
SBC restructuring, future By William H. Perkins Jr.

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5/3/95

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--"The sparks are there. The Holy Spirit is speaking to his people," said Southern Baptist Convention President Jim Henry of revival reports from numerous localities across the country.

Henry touched on revival, the proposed restructuring of the SBC and other topics in comments to a group of Mississippi College supporters April 28 gathered for breakfast at First Baptist Church, Jackson, prior to the inauguration of Howell W. Todd as the 18th president of the Baptist-affiliated school in Clinton.

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Henry and Todd are old friends from their days together at Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., where Henry was pastor and Todd was a deacon and choir member.

Henry, now pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, Fla., congratulated the school on the selection of Todd. He described Todd as a man who "embodies the heart and soul of who Southern Baptists are."

In other comments, Henry noted his support for the convention-wide restructuring proposal commonly known as the "Brister report," to be voted on by messengers to the SBC annual meeting June 20-22 in Atlanta's Georgia Dome.

"The Brister report is exciting," Henry said. "I'm supporting it, but I didn't come here to sell it. There is a growing sense in the ranks that changes need to be made. It never hurts to look inside; it will be healthy."

Henry said he believes the members of the Program and Structure Study Committee, chaired by Mark Brister, a Shreveport, La., pastor, were sincere in their efforts to restructure the Southern Baptist Convention for the 21st century.

"If there is an ax to grind, I didn't see it," Henry stressed.

Henry listed a number of his concerns for the future of the Southern Baptist Convention:

-- Levels of giving to Southern Baptist causes. "The struggle has had an impact," Henry said of the theological/political controversy the SBC has weathered, "but there's more. There is the materialism of our culture; the baby boomers need a change of lifestyle. We haven't stressed tithing from the pulpit."

-- Diversity. "We have a big, wide umbrella. One of our biggest challenges is understanding each other."

-- Talent drain. "I get the sense that some of our finest young people are going elsewhere for seminary education. We've got to keep our best for the future."

-- Fall-out among pastors and church staff. "We lost 2,000 last year. We must help our people deal with the challenges (of church work)."

-- Denominational loyalty. "There is a constant influx of people who don't know about Southern Baptists."

-- Trust. "There's a lack of trust among us, and that is a burden on my heart."

-- Ignorance of polity and doctrine among the 15 million Southern Baptists. "We must address this if we are to move forward."

Henry said he is heartened by the "great love" for the Southern Baptist Convention that he sees as he travels the nation.

"Missions, evangelism and authority of the Scripture have held us together," he said.

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Facing jail without bond,
Nobles to return to Miss.

By William H. Perkins Jr.

Baptist Press
5/3/95

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--Former Mississippi College President Lewis Nobles is scheduled to return to Mississippi from the federal prison facility in Missouri where he has been undergoing mental evaluation the past two months.

Ike Durr, U.S. marshal for Mississippi's southern district, said May 2 Nobles was scheduled to be transported to Jackson May 3, but he released no other details for security reasons.

Brad Pigott, U.S. attorney in Jackson, has publicly confirmed he will seek to have Nobles confined without bond when marshals return him to Mississippi.

Al Jeanner tt, chief deputy U.S. marshal in Jackson, said once Nobles is back in the state, he will be placed in a federally approved local jail somewhere in Mississippi.

The Madison County Jail in Canton and the Simpson County Jail in Mendenhall are used extensively to house federal prisoners who appear in U.S. District Court in Jackson.

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Nobles was scheduled for trial Feb. 7 on a 21-count federal indictment that charged him with using donations intended for the Baptist-affiliated institution in Clinton to allegedly commit money laundering, mail fraud, tax evasion and illegal interstate acts of immorality.

A federal fugitive warrant was issued for Nobles when he failed to appear at a Jan. 26 pre-trial hearing. Pigott has previously declined to confirm or deny that Nobles intended to plead guilty at the hearing to at least some of the charges in a plea bargain arrangement.

Nobles was located about 13 hours later in an upscale San Francisco hotel with a "substantial amount of cash," according to Woody Johnson, special agent in charge of the Jackson FBI office.

Nobles collapsed in the hotel room and was rushed to a local hospital where he underwent emergency surgery to repair internal damage caused when he allegedly swallowed an unspecified poison as FBI agents knocked on the hotel room door.

He underwent a second surgery in San Francisco and also suffered what Ben Nash of Clinton, his physician son-in-law, described in a recent court hearing as "metabolic encephalopathy" -- changes in the structure of the brain -- that rendered him incapable of remembering his name and barely recognizing his wife and daughter. He has been held in a federal facility in Springfield, Mo.

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Southern, Jackson differ
over teaching assignment

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
5/3/95

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Whether a teaching assignment was extended to Richard Jackson from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Boyce Bible School continues to be debated although both Jackson and the school agree Jackson would not sign the seminary's Abstract of Principles.

Seminary officials said April 28 a teaching assignment was not offered. However, Jackson responded in a telephone interview May 2 he and the seminary had reached agreement for him to be a guest lecturer in a one-week Boyce course this summer.

A subsequent letter by Jackson declining to teach at Boyce made its way to the news media. Jackson told Baptist Press he mailed the letter April 25 just to two officials at the Louisville, Ky., seminary and not to any news media. The letter was received "unsolicited" by Associated Baptist Press from an "unidentified source," the Jacksonville, Fla., news service said in a May 1 story.

Jackson described his letter as personal and kind, and he said he did not intend for it to be made public and did not know how it was forwarded to the media. The two SBTS officials, David S. Dockery, vice president for academic affairs, and Jim Woolums Jr., Boyce assistant dean, said they did not release Jackson's letter to the press.

Seminary officials, after an initial news report April 27, responded Jackson had not been asked to teach because of his refusal to sign the seminary's doctrinal documents, the traditional Abstract of Principles and a more recent Covenant Renewal.

Seminary President R. Albert Mohler Jr. was quoted in a Baptist Press story April 28 as saying, "I will never sign a contract or approve for instruction any person who refuses to sign the Abstract of Principles. I will not approve for employment any person who has assumed a leadership or other public role in support of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the Alliance of Baptists or any other group opposed to the Southern Baptist Convention."

"I just didn't want to sign a creed," Jackson said May 2. But, he said, he had agreed in March to write a letter stating he had no disagreement with the documents, as requested by Boyce assistant dean Jim Woolums Jr.

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Boyce's dean, Bob Johnson, issued a statement that, "There was no formal teaching contract ever extended to Dr. Jackson. There had been discussions, but nothing had been finalized. We had not listed Dr. Jackson in the summer teaching schedule. Boyce recommends persons for teaching positions but final approval must come from the seminary administration. The seminary administration had never approved Dr. Jackson as a Boyce professor."

In his letter declining the teaching position, Jackson said he reiterated his disagreement with signing the doctrinal statements and voiced concern over recent events on campus. Jackson said he did not address the recent firing of Diana R. Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work in a faculty hiring dispute with Mohler, but took issue with criticism that had been directed to students for voicing their concerns over the events.

Jackson also said he has given no funds to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship organization of Baptist moderates, compared to his longstanding support of the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program at his former church, North Phoenix Baptist in Arizona. He said he has spoken on evangelism at some CBF gatherings. He said he has absolutely no ties with the Alliance of Baptists, another breakaway organization from the SBC.

He retired from the Phoenix church in 1993 and now is president of the Richard Jackson Center for Evangelism and Encouragement at Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas.

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Home Mission Board to get
new address, phone number

Baptist Press
5/3/95

ATLANTA (BP)--The Home Mission Board is scheduled to move into its new office building Memorial Day weekend.

The board will close Thursday evening, May 25, and reopen Tuesday morning, May 30, said Joe Gatlin, HMB facilities management director.

The agency's new address will be 4200 North Point Parkway, Alpharetta, Ga., 30202-4174.

The board's main telephone number will be (404) 410-6000 until Sept. 1. Afterwards, the area code for Alpharetta will change from 404 to 770.

Telephone numbers for individuals and departments also will change and may be obtained from the switchboard operator. Toll-free numbers for the HMB prayer line, (800) 554-PRAY, volunteer information, (800) HMB-VOLS, and customer service, (800) 634-2462, will not change.

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Johnson urges 'warm touch'
amid high-tech advances

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
5/3/95

SHAWNEE, Okla. (BP)--Today's "fast-forward technology," said Jack Johnson, must be anchored to a "freeze-framed theology."

Johnson, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, commented on today's high-tech world in an April 24 visit to the Shawnee, Okla., campus to address the Christian Vocation Students Banquet and to receive a distinguished alumnus award from OBU's Joe L. Ingram School of Christian Service.

"We dare not substitute high-tech for the warm touch," Johnson said. "Your touch becomes the touch of God. Your ministry is the ministry of God."

During his student days, Johnson recounted, television was used only sparingly to proclaim the gospel, while radio was the premiere medium for ministry.

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"Television has emerged as the single greatest tool for sharing the gospel," Johnson said. "At the RTVC, we operate two television networks. ACTS is a cable network with over 22 million homes. That means about 55 million people are able to receive our cable signal. FamilyNet is a broadcast network that is available to another 30 million homes. That translates to about 75 million people who can receive our message. The total population who can receive our television signal is 130 million. In addition, we have five radio programs with a combined radio audience of over 200 million. We also produce distance learning, interactive multimedia and spot announcements for local television stations."

In the near future, Johnson told the students, they would see the blending of telephone, computer, radio and television into interactive communication. He said television will progress to "high definition," which would increase the quality of the picture five times to the quality of a movie theater.

"Interactive CD-ROM is gaining widespread acceptance in education and training," he said. "CD-ROM is said to reduce learning time by 50 percent, increase retention by 100 percent, reduce cost, improve instructional consistency and make learning more enjoyable."

The RTVC president said radio continues to be used by more Americans than any other medium, with 99 percent of American homes having a radio receiver.

"The average home has 5.6 radios," he said. "The future of radio is digital radio broadcasting. Digital radio will connect the radio and computer. Coupons offered by radio will be available to radio listeners on their computer just by pushing a button."

Johnson suggested three ways students could put a warm touch to the high-tech future: to accept accountability, enlarge their vision and cultivate their compassion.

In discussing accountability, he said, "Your call is a call to be set apart for the gospel. You are accountable for ministry. Your high calling is not to comfort, ego, conformity or success. We are set apart by God to be servants. This will never change. You must not allow your ministry to be sacrificed to envy."

On the subject of vision, Johnson said, "Your view to the future will determine your capacity for success. The unassertive soul lives with a brief backward vision. He or she is kept under the thumb of the past. The changing future is fearful and intimidating.

"The unfocused minister will be out to sea in the whirlwind future we face."

Speaking about compassion, he said, "Not only must we feel for the multitude, we must tell them about the good Shepherd."

Johnson noted, "Modeling a ministry for the next millennium will not be an easy task. You must carefully mix the biblical truth of ministry with the latest technology. The easier task will be to adapt to the new technology. The more difficult task will be to accept accountability, enlarge your vision and cultivate your compassion. The rewards are eternal."

Johnson is the 11th recipient of OBU's School of Christian Service award.

Dick Rader, vice president of religious life and dean of the School of Christian Service, said that several years ago OBU started recognizing alumni in the field of ministry.

"We wanted to spotlight for young people successful graduates who are role models," he said. "We think it is important for them to see people honored who are making a difference in ministry."

Skaggs shares music, faith
at Hemphill inauguration

By Mark Christie

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--An electricity filled the crisp morning air as Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's family came together beneath the spreading pecan trees on Seminary Hill. Ricky Skaggs and his five-member band approached the platform to face a most unique audience. Some began to clap and sing, others to fellowship with colleagues. Still others stood watching the faces of students, faculty and trustees to see Southwestern's family celebrate together.

"It's bluegrass time!" Skaggs shouted at the microphone, and young and old began to enjoy the country music for which Skaggs is best known. "God is not just in Christian music," Skaggs said in an interview later that day. "We never know the power of songs, we just never know, and when they come under the anointing like that, they go in and touch lives."

Skaggs was the featured performer at a May 2 picnic following the previous day's inauguration of Southwestern's seventh president, Ken Hemphill. Hemphill donned a cowboy hat and boots for the occasion.

An invitation from Hemphill himself and a love for Southern Baptists brought Skaggs all the way from Nashville to Southwestern. Skaggs, who attends a Southern Baptist church in Tennessee, offered to bring his band along at no cost just for the occasion.

"There's no greater investment that I could have made than to sow into this particular ministry here. There's just something about sowing into the kingdom," Skaggs said.

Skaggs also said he wanted to see a revival among Southern Baptists "to make a difference in reaching numbers for the kingdom."

The mood of the morning slightly changed as Skaggs related the importance of putting God first in the family. His wife, Sharon, joined him on stage to sing, "It Takes Three." Meanwhile, a father lifted his son up on his shoulders and gripped his wife's hand.

"It's really hard," Skaggs said, speaking about his marriage and home life. "But there's nothing that's impossible with God. Our marriages and families are the most important things, and if there's a problem at home, then we need to deal with that. We need to get our house in order before we do anything else."

Skaggs spoke firsthand about the pain of divorce, having experienced it in the 1970s, when he said he was much younger and less spiritually mature. He urged students to keep God at the center of their families, especially at seminary, which is often a trying time for married couples.

"It's important to have our mate's blessing to do what we feel God has called us to do," he said, "because a lot of times we can get into something that we think is really God's will but may just be a good intention."

Saying God has called him to be a "seed sower," Skaggs said he sees himself as a minister, though he doesn't get to see huge numbers of people come to know Christ at his concerts. Instead, he finds contentment in reaching a different audience with the subtle messages in his songs about family, moral living and fidelity.

"Although I own the microphone for that one hour, I don't have the right to shove religion down somebody's throat. I do have the right to say who I am and not be ashamed of it, though," he said.

Skaggs said he wants to "be a light," but he doesn't want to shine it directly into anyone's eyes.

"You might not want to come back if I did that," he said. "But if you're in trouble and you see a light you can go to, it's like a refuge, a salvation, a lifeline."

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Although Skaggs has publicly testified to his audiences of his commitment to Christ, he said he feels it's something he's now learning to balance with his lifestyle. Sometimes he just talks about his love for his family and tells redneck jokes. People still compliment him on his Christian testimony, even when he doesn't mention God at all.

"I know that I would probably never have to say I'm a Christian again in my life, and people would know I am," Skaggs said. "When we become mature and more like Jesus, we don't have to keep saying it. The presence of the Lord will be known in our lives."

His newest project is titled, "Silent Witness," a 96-minute video in which he and other country musicians perform and give their testimonies. Skaggs made the tape available to the seminary audience during the concert.

Following the concert, a small group of people formed around Skaggs with albums, pens and scraps of paper. A Southwestern trustee asked for an autograph, then a small child. One student asked to pray with him. Another told him how one of his songs had helped heal his brother's broken marriage.

"I can't save or heal anybody," Skaggs said. "It's the Spirit of God. God may or may not use me to touch somebody. But I'm confident enough with the Holy Spirit that he's going to do what he does best. He's going to convict people's hearts and bring them to the Lord."

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(BP) photos available on SBCNet and upon request from Southwestern's office of public relations

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