

Photo Archives ID's Heritage Award Winner By GEORGE H. NEWMAN

The Tampa Tribune

Published: March 19, 2008

PLANT CITY - The Plant City Photo Archives will present its annual Heritage Award this month to a man who cared for generations of Plant City residents.

Retired physician Harold Brewer, better known as "Dr. Hal," was chosen for his long service to the community and for his help to the photo archives, said Gil Gott, director of the nonprofit that preserves the area's photo history.

"One of the important activities Dr. Brewer has done for the photo archives is his ability to sit down with a stack of anonymous historic photos and identify almost everyone shown," Gott said. "His skill in doing that ... goes a long way to make these old photographs tell a story about our history. His amazing recall has helped make the photo archives and Plant City history meaningful to old and new residents alike."



Brewer, who turns 81 today, will be presented with the award at a gala beginning at 6:30 p.m. March 29 in the Red Rose Ballroom at the Red Rose Inn and Suites, 2011 N. Wheeler St. The program, An Evening of Perfect Memories, will have a school days theme.

Brewer served the community as a family physician for 35 years and several times traveled to provide medical care to the poor in foreign countries. His list of accomplishments is legendary, including 1970

Citizen of the Year, past president of the Greater Plant City Chamber of Commerce, longtime member of the East Hillsborough Historical Society, Sunday school teacher and member of the executive committee of the photo archives. He also was a founding member and serves as president of the community theater group Plant City Entertainment, is a member of the Plant City Toastmasters Club and serves as emcee at large gatherings.

Brewer, his wife and their four children, Cynthia, Daniel, Les and Rodney, were named Florida's All-American Family in 1971.

Brewer estimates he had more than 200,000 patient visits in Plant City during his 35-year practice. The first 10 years he made house calls.

"I met a lot of people in that time. I liked it. Got to see how they lived," Brewer said. "But it became too time-consuming. I was needed and could see more people in the office."

He also delivered about 5,000 babies at South Florida Baptist Hospital during his first decade here.

Brewer maintains a small office on Plant Avenue, where his old office still stands. He has his medical books, memorabilia and keepsakes stored there.

Previous winners of the photo archives' Heritage Award include David E. Bailey Jr., James L. Redman, Robert Trinkle, B.M. "Mac" Smith Jr. and Betty Barker Watkins.

Brewer was born in 1927 in Hattiesburg, Miss. He lived his early life in Richton, about 20 miles east of Hattiesburg. He graduated from Richton High in 1944, when World War II was in full swing.

"I joined the Air Force right out of high school," Brewer said. "I wanted to be a pilot, but their quota was full and they suggested I spend a year in school and then get back with them."

After attending the University of Mississippi for a year in pre-med, Brewer found there was still no room for him as a pilot. He was granted a release from that branch of the service, so he could join the Navy in May 1945. After his 1946 discharge, he returned to Ole Miss to study pharmacy.

While in school, he met his future wife, Lynn, who was also a student there. In 1951, they were married in Memphis, Tenn., where her family lived. After he graduated from pharmacy school, using benefits of the GI Bill to help finance his education, the Brewers moved to Laurel, Miss., where he worked as a pharmacist.

He later decided to become a physician and enrolled in the University of Mississippi's School of Medicine in Jackson.

He graduated from medical school in 1958 and followed the advice of a longtime friend and came to Tampa to apply for his residency at Tampa General Hospital.

Eighteen months after moving to Tampa, Brewer and his family settled in Plant City.

Lynn Brewer said she was struck by the friendliness of the residents when they moved here in 1960.

"I was raised a big-city girl in Memphis," Lynn Brewer said. "I remember going into a local store to

pick up some groceries while Hal watched the kids in the car."

She was stopped and talked to by several people in the store.

"They wanted to know where I was from, what church I went to, how many children we had and where we were living," she said. "I've learned that is the way people are in a small town. It's still that way. People just want to get to know you. I went back to the car and told Hal I had never seen such inquisitive people."

Lynn Brewer recalled how her husband became a topic of humor during his first year in Plant City when he caught a case of the mumps from his children.

"People thought it was hilarious that the new doctor in town was sick and couldn't come to the office," she said. "He was out for two weeks. It was the first break he had taken from work for years. It was like a vacation."

He lived within walking distance of his office and South Florida Baptist Hospital. He retired in 1995.

"We all love Plant City," Lynn Brewer said. "That includes the children because they have all moved back here to raise their families."

Dodie White, a member of Plant City Entertainment, said she was delighted to learn that Brewer was going to receive the archives' Heritage Award.

"Hal is very deserving," White said. "And we appreciate everything he has done for us over the years. Everybody loves him. And I can honestly say I have never heard anyone say anything bad about him.

"He's a Plant City treasure."

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Plant City Photo Archives annual gala, An Evening of Perfect Memories, with a school days theme

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. March 29

WHERE: Red Rose Ballroom at Red Rose Inn and Suites, 2011 N. Wheeler St.

FEATURES: Champagne reception, jazz combo from Florida Southern College, hors d'oeuvre buffet, wine bar, photo trivia contest and presentation of the Heritage Award to retired physician Hal Brewer. There will be an extensive display of photos of schools, students and activities throughout the years in keeping with the theme.

TICKETS: \$85 per person

INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS: Call the photo archives office at (813) 754-1578.

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