Graham: Six Mile has come long way in 100 years

U.S. senator helps town celebrate centennial

BY GREG OLIVER
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SIX MILE — Six Mile has experienced its share of highs and lows over the last 100 years.

A rich education heritage, including the former Six Mile Baptist Academy and continuing today with Six Mile Elementary School, Cherokee heritage, having four Medal of Honor recipients and the slow, steady pace of a small town atmosphere are among the highlights. The 1929 tornado that ripped through the town, killing nine people — including an entire family — serves as the low point.

But, through it all, the town continues to thrive. Last week, during the town's centennial celebration dinner, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham credited the citizens of Six Mile — past and present — as the reason.

"There's probably some 50 times in the last 100 years that it could have fallen apart — just like a church or family," Graham said. "But people worked together and put their differences aside, and that's what we're losing in modern America."

Whereas Graham said Six Mile, like America, didn't enjoy the modern conveniences of cars, TVs and radios a century ago, he said that citizens of today aren't necessarily better off. The economy is hurting, evidenced by the 9.6 percent unemployment rate; the Internet, while a valuable informational tool, also contains materials that pollute the mind; and the Social Security and Medicare programs face uncertain futures.

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State Sen. Larry Martin and his wife, Susan, view one of the 20 panels depicting the town's 100-year history on permanent display at the Six Mile Community Center. The town celebrated its centennial Friday.

Celebrates 100 years

Graham said what makes Six Mile great is that, like America, people have been willing to do what it takes to provide a better life for the next generation. That determination is what the Central native said inspires him today and should also serve as an inspiration to others.

"It is my hope that, over the next 100 years, we do things that people will look back on and say, 'You know what? They fought like Tigers but came together when they had to.'"

While Graham said it's fine for people to want a better life for their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, even to the point where they get mad at government for perceived shortcomings, he cautioned, "Nothing's ever going to happen unless people are willing to work together."

"If we can't find a better way to work together, our best days are behind us," he said. "But if we find a way to work together, our best days are before us."

Following the banquet, Graham and other invited dignitaries were bused to the Six Mile Community Center, where 20 panels surrounded the walls. The panels, standing 5 feet tall, each contain nearly 20 photos and articles depicting decades throughout the past 100 years.

The panels, which were opened to the public Saturday, can now be viewed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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"In the next 20 years, 30 million baby boomers are going to retire and people are living longer," Graham said. "No one ever planned for Social Security to be stretched that way.

"We're at a stage in America where all these programs that have been kicked down the road are coming home to roost. We've got to make hard decisions, but the World War II generation that fought Hitler and Tojo didn't whine and complain."

In South Carolina, textile mills that once served as a staple of communities are virtually nonexistent today, and Graham said that means higher education has become a necessity.

"To give kids a meaningful job in the 20th century, they're going to have to go to school and they're going to have to learn about things we didn't even know existed," he said.