

TheRegion

A weekly look at news
from around the Cape Fear region

SAMPSON COUNTY



Contributed photos

Cecil and Merle Odom recently celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. 'She had the prettiest brown eyes I've ever seen,' Cecil says, 'and she still does.'

Romance endures 65 years

NEWTON GROVE — Even after 65 years of marriage, Cecil and Merle Odom have a standing dinner date.

Every day, without fail, he puts on a nice shirt and drives the few minutes from the home they once shared to the dining hall of the Rolling Ridge Retirement Center off N.C. 55.

It isn't dinner by candlelight, but no matter.

As long as they're together. He wouldn't miss it for anything in the world.

"Her eyes light up when I'm here," said Cecil, who turned 87 in April. "And she makes my eyes light up. She makes my heart light up, too."

The years have taken a toll. Cecil's hair has silvered, and his steps are a bit more measured these days. Health issues have plagued Merle, a woman once known for a sweet singing voice and the best turkey dressing anyone had ever tasted.

"I miss her cooking," Cecil said. "Meatloaf, banana pudding, country-style steak, greens the way I like them."

"I'd put her cooking up



Kim Hasty

against anybody's, and I truly miss it."

Both grew up in Sampson County and knew each other in high school, but it wasn't until he was in college that sparks flew.

"I thought she had the most beautiful brown eyes that I had ever seen," Cecil said, "and she still does."

They were married March 29, 1949, after he graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He went about the business of making a living, and she went about the business of making a home.

"She could do anything," their daughter, Angel Odom, said. "She would have made an excellent teacher. She would have made an excellent anything, but she wanted to stay home and take care of me and my brother."

ONLINE

■ See video of Cecil Odom talking about his wife's pretty brown eyes at fayobserver.com.

Angel Odom remembered one year when she was cast in the role of the Cowardly Lion in the school's production of "The Wizard of Oz."

"Mama collected the brown paper wrappings from the laundry man," she said. "She made me the most realistic lion costume using that paper. She even cut little strips and curled them for the fur."

Cecil Odom helped found the Sampson County Farm Bureau in Clinton, often working late hours. "He'd have to wait sometimes for the farmers to come in from the fields," he daughter said, "so that he could have an appointment with them."

But the years were good. Cecil's business allowed the couple the opportunity to travel. There were cruises and Broadway shows, as well as trips to Hawaii, Europe, even Hong Kong. They were faithful members of Brownings United

Methodist Church.

Later, their two children gave them grandchildren. Now they have great-grandchildren and a great-great-grandchild.

So many good memories. So many years that passed too quickly.

"They're an inspiration to me," Angel Odom said. "I'd rather have them for parents than be the president's kid. Or the richest duke's kid."

So when their 65th anniversary arrived, Angel arranged a small and tasteful celebration at Rolling Ridge with cake and ice cream for all the residents.

It was a tribute to faithfulness and to a love that has endured.

The romance has endured, too.

"She enjoys being kissed," he said, "and I enjoy kissing her."

With his chiseled good looks and her dark-haired beauty, the Odoms still cut a dashing swath through the halls of the retirement home.

"She was my world," Cecil said, "and she still is."

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— Angel Odom, daughter of Cecil and Merle Odom