



Flying Pastor: Gene Horton

Baptist minister has taught scores of people how to fly

April 08, 2009 8:26 PM

By [DEBBIE DAMRON/Special to the Star](#)



Gene Horton has had a love of airplanes since he was a little boy.

"I took my first airplane ride in Killeen ... at the age of 11. I decided then that I would be a pilot," he said.

Horton has been a pastor for 56 years and has pastored six Southern Baptist churches. He has been at Rio Hondo First Baptist Church for more than 41 years.

The church has prospered under his leadership and has sponsored a weekly television program for almost 40 years, currently seen on KGBT-4 each Sunday morning.

He was converted to Jesus Christ while at Baylor University. When he was a senior at Baylor, he transferred to Texas A&M at Corpus Christi and graduated in 1958.

He began work on a master's degree at Texas A&M in Kingsville and after several years earned a master's and doctorate at Trinity Seminary.

Horton, 75, and his wife, Phynetta, and their three children moved in 1961 to Lyford, where he became pastor of the Baptist church.

As he ministered in this farming community, his life-long interest in airplanes was sparked by the very frequent sightings of crop-dusters diving up and down the fields.

"One of my church members owned and operated a crop-dusting service in Raymondville and offered me flight lessons. As he watched, I soloed in a Piper J3 Cub in 1962," he said. "I then trained to be an ag pilot (crop duster)."

Soon, additional preparation led to a private pilot's license, then a commercial license and a FAA-certified instructor rating.

Continuing to pastor full-time, he used his piloting to befriend many in the community who shared an interest in flying. He taught scores of men to fly and then solo as he had done.

In 1968, he moved his family to Rio Hondo to become the pastor of the Baptist Church.