



# Mission Alabama, April 2010

---

by Andrea Knight

## **Cross Brand Cowboy Church: Branded for Eternity**

George\* and Alice\* had been married for awhile, and Alice regularly prayed for George. George, however, was not interested. He had a drug addiction and was in and out of jail for years. But one day Alice started attending Cross Brand Cowboy Church in Center Star, Alabama, and this was the beginning of major changes for her family.



Alice kept praying for George and their son, who seemed to be heading down the same path as his dad. After visiting Cross Brand Cowboy Church a few Sundays, George came with Alice. The following week, George and Alice's son came to church too. It only took about one month for George to accept Christ. And his son accepted Christ just a few months later. The family is now very involved in the church and James\*, the son, is now a leader in the youth group!

The people of Cross Brand Cowboy Church didn't do anything extra special to reach George, Alice and James. Instead, the Cross Brand members just accepted each member of the family and showed them the love of Christ.

"We say come as you are," says Pastor Jim Copeland. "Some people think that means just their dress. But they come to understand that it means their hurts and things they have going on in life too."

After moving to Alabama in 2007 to retire, Pastor Copeland quickly saw the need to start a cowboy church similar to where he served in Waxahatchie, Texas. Copeland started Cross Brand Cowboy Church July 27, 2008. Since then, the church has grown to minister to more than 150 people through Sunday morning worship services, Bible studies called Bunkhouse Meetings and a host of ministries.

Eddy Garner, Director of Missions for the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association is excited to see a church that reaches people in a unique way. At its' annual meeting in October, 2009, The Colbert-Lauderdale Association voted to make Cross Brand Cowboy Church its' newest member.

Pastor Copeland affirms that the partnership with the Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association has been great. Being part of the Association has also connected Cross Brand Church with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "It is the common desire to reach the lost that brings us together," says Pastor Copeland. These are tremendous partnerships for the cause of Christ!

But what's different? What makes this church a cowboy church rather than a traditional church?

"We try to remove the barriers that prevent people from coming to church," says Copeland. "We don't pass the plate. A lot of the folks we try to reach just simply don't have money." Instead, Copeland says, there's a place in the back of the church to drop an offering.

“When the plate comes and they don’t have anything to put in it, it’s an embarrassment,” says Copeland. “I don’t care about your money. I want your heart. We’ll let the Lord take care of the rest.”

Cowboy churches also do not have an altar call at the end of the service. “You can meet Jesus anywhere. You can have a conversion experience no matter where you are. I have people with prison records sit there with huge crocodile tears,” says Copeland.

Cowboy churches “do church” a little differently from the traditional church and are able to reach a unique segment of society. Cross Brand recognizes that many traditional churches are filled with women and children, but this cowboy church seeks to minister to men first.

“We focus on the man of the family,” says Copeland. “I stress to men that the spiritual leadership of the home is their responsibility. We know that if we get the men here, the women and children will follow. We see many whose wives have prayed for years and when he comes to cowboy church he is saved.”

Cross Brand has also just started Reins of Glory, a ministry to at-risk youth in the community. They focus on getting at-risk youth involved with a horse. Through spending a lot of time with the horses and the leaders of the ministry, the youth learn lessons about life and they hear the Gospel every week.

“We hope they will develop a sense of pride while working with the horses,” says Copeland. “By the end of eight weeks, they’ll be able to mount and ride a horse, which is something that most of them have not done before. In the process they’ll learn what Jesus has done for them.”

Even though the church is less than two years old, Cross Brand has already carved out a place in the Center Star community. Every year, the church hosts a stick horse rodeo for children ages 2 to 12. The children do rodeo events, such as riding and showing, on stick horses. The stick-horse rodeo is a fund-raiser and all of the money is given back to an agency or someone in the community with a need.

Cross Brand seeks to minister to people throughout the community in a variety of ways. The church works with the local rodeo association for children ages 2-18. In addition, Cross Brand’s arena will be completed this spring and Copeland says they hope to offer horse shows, penning, roping and bull riding events there. Free Bibles are given out at each arena event and all arena events include an opening prayer and devotion. “It’s not unusual to have baptisms at arena events,” Copeland adds.

Reaching people with the love of Christ is the desire of the members of Cross Brand Church. Director of Missions, Eddy Garner says, “They sincerely minister to people where they are. I have been impressed with the church and its’ members.”

“When they get here, they see that there’s no one who is going to judge them,” says Pastor Copeland. “We’re here for one purpose – to reach the lost.”

*\*Names have been changed.*

## **Prayer Requests**

- Ask God to make His guidance clear to Pastor Jim Copeland and the leaders of Cross Brand Cowboy Church. Pray that God would reveal to them where He is working and that they will be available to join God.
- Pray that God will continue to call out men in the Center Star community to seek Him and that they will lead their families to Christ.
- Ask God to bless “Reins of Glory,” the church’s ministry to at-risk youth.
- Pray for unity and understanding in the Cross Brand fellowship so they can continue to understand the needs of the community and work together to reach the lost.

## **Ways to Get Involved**

- Your gifts through the Cooperative Program help to fund new church starts in Alabama.
- Work with your Association to begin a cowboy church in your area.
- For more information, contact Gary Swafford in the office of Associational Missions & Church Planting at 800.264.1225 ext.323 or [gswafford@alsbom.org](mailto:gswafford@alsbom.org).