

Into Armenia

N.C. Baptist partnership bearing fruit



LONELY OUTPOST — An eighth century temple of the Armenian Apostolic Church stands watch on a former island, overlooking Lake Sevan. When the Soviets channeled water from Sevan to other projects, the island became a peninsula.

Despite poverty, Baptists prosper in Armenia

By Tony W. Cartledge
BR Editor

YEREVAN, Armenia — Sweet apricots that spring from Armenia's volcanic soil are considered the "queen of Armenian fruits." A hard freeze in early spring decimated the crop and made Armenian apricots a rare commodity this year, but spiritual fruit is flourishing across the country.

Three years into a partnership with the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of Armenia (ECBUA), N.C. Baptist Men can point to a number of significant advances, including major

improvements at the Theological Seminary of Armenia in Ashtarak and the planting of several new churches.

The physical and financial contributions of volunteers working through N.C. Baptist Men have played a major role in recent progress, according to Asatur Nahapetyan, who serves as general secretary for the ECBUA and as rector of the seminary. Nahapetyan is hopeful that the partnership will remain strong, and that many more teams will come and assure Armenians that "we are not alone."

Armenia is a crossroads country, pinched between

the southeastern fringe of Europe and the northern edge of Southwest Asia, with a culture distinctly flavored by the Middle East.

The Republic of Armenia wraps around the eastern end of Turkey, with which it has poor relations and a closed border. Armenia claims the massive mountains of Ararat, now in northern Turkey, and continues to harbor ill will from ancient conflicts and a Turkish genocide of Armenian peoples that led to

a million and a half deaths during the years surrounding World War I.

When Armenia was forcibly attached to the Soviet Union shortly thereafter, Stalin apportioned parts of the country to Azerbaijan. As a result, lands claimed by Azerbaijan now lay both east and west of Armenia. The mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabagh remains contested, though it has been under Armenian (Continued to Page 8)



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Have excavator, will travel: volunteer just wants to serve

By Norman Jameson
BSC Communications

Benny Langston could have earned \$300 an hour pulling trees off houses with his excavator after Hurricane Isabel. But that was not enough. So he did it for free.

"I'm here to serve and want to do as much as I can while I'm here," said Langston, who hauled his 21-ton Caterpillar excavator to Elizabeth City from Selma to assist Baptist Men's disaster relief teams in the area devastated by the 2003 hurricane. A local volunteer guided Langston quickly from job to job, enabling Langston and his machine to do the work of

100 men — and do it for free.

"I told the excavator, 'You haven't served the Lord before probably, but we're going to go serve the Lord,'" Langston said. He pulled up to one house groaning beneath a huge oak lying across its roof. Another crane operator had just offered to lift the tree off the roof — for \$4,800. The elderly owner, who had no insurance, was beside himself.

"When we did it for free, he couldn't believe it," Langston said. "We saved people \$70,000 to \$80,000 in a short period, during a time when others descended on the area looking to make a lot of money out of the disaster. People were so happy to see

us, they'd clap their hands when we drove up. One elderly lady couldn't live in her house because she was afraid the tree would crash through. She was out in the yard picking up limbs and she hugged every single one of our necks and told us, 'I'm so glad y'all are here to help me.' That was so wonderful. That memory stands out."

Langston and other Baptist Men volunteers prayed with victims after they pulled the trees off their houses,

or cut fallen trees away from driveways. "We thanked God for protecting them when the tree fell on their

houses," he said.

Baptist Men's work is funded totally by gifts through the North Carolina Mission Offering (NCMO) received in

churches in September.

After a stint as a Selma policeman and a general contract maintenance man, Langston, 41, is building a "destruction" business, demolish- (Continued to Page 10)

"I didn't want to just be a couch Christian. I wanted to do something. I wanted the Lord to use me."