

ADF lawsuit prompts Mississippi city to officially lift ban on drive-in church services

Alliance Defending Freedom
The Greenville City Council has issued a new order that lifts the city’s unconstitutional ban on drive-in church services during the coronavirus crisis in the wake of a lawsuit that Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys filed on behalf of a local church.

*Two Cousins

(Continued from page 1.)
natural to join in on what is a longtime family hobby.

“I got my first horse at 2 years old,” he says. “Horses are just something our family has always had. We ride around the yard. We race them. It’s just fun.”

With the help of Tredell’s dad, Tredell Meeks Sr., the pair trained the horses they ride themselves. They work with them every day and balance feeding, grooming, and riding with their schoolwork. Competition season requires a more intense practice schedule, which Meeks makes sure they follow. He wants them to have fun, but he also wants them to do the work to be prepared for events.

“We practice every day, even if it is raining,” says Meeks. “When we get beat, we get beat at our best. Even then, if they had fun, then that’s all that matters.”

Tredell and Anthony enjoy 4-H for its social aspect, too. “We get to meet a lot of new people,” Anthony says. “We get to watch them ride. We get riding tips from other people. People like to watch us compete, and they cheer

withdrew its request for a temporary restraining order against the city Wednesday in light of the city’s changed position.

The U.S. Department of Justice filed a statement of interest in the case, Temple Baptist Church v. City of Greenville, agreeing with the church that the ban cannot single out churches while allowing similar types of ac-

on.

They are entertaining, says Mississippi State University Extension Agent Betsy Padgett.

“Daisy is really an amazing horse. She and Tredell are something to see,” she explains. “Tredell and Anthony do team events, and that is fun to watch because they work so well together. They’ve come a long way since they first joined 4-H. They put in the time it takes to get ready for show season, and they have been rewarded pretty well for their dedication.”

The pair’s success in the arena has a lot to do with their relationship with their horses. Daisy was skittish when the family first got her, and it took about a year to get her gentle. Now anyone can ride her, but she knows when it’s showtime.

“We can put a 3-year-old on her, and she takes it easy,” says Tredell. “My dad or anybody can get on her. But when I get on her, she will fly. She knows the difference.”

Inside or outside the arena, the emotional bond they share with their horses is important.

tivities elsewhere, such as drive-in restaurants.

“Public officials are right to care about public health and safety during the coronavirus crisis, but they are wrong when they treat churches more harshly than others in government orders related to it,” said ADF Senior Counsel Ryan Tucker, director of the ADF Center for Christian Ministries. “We commend

“Horses can read you,” Anthony explains. “If you are nervous, your horse can tell. And, if your horse is nervous, you can tell. If that happens, I just talk to her, and she calms down.”

Tredell says it’s all about the horses anyway.

“If you ask any pro rider, they will tell you that, during competition, it’s about your horse; it’s not about you,” he says.

Their competitions are still a family pastime, with as many as 20 family members and friends going along. Padgett says that is part of what 4-H is about.

“4-H brings families together,” she says. “It’s something they can do together that allows young people to learn. They win ribbons and a little recognition. But they walk away with a lot of life skills.”

Both Tredell and Anthony will compete in 4-H one more year. After 2020, they will be too old to participate in the program, but they aren’t giving up horses or competing. They plan to continue competing on their college’s rodeo team and say they will always own and train horses.

Greenville for dropping its unconstitutional ban, which prohibited drive-in church services but allowed similar types of activities, such as eating at drive-in restaurants. That overreaching ban wasn’t necessary to protect health and safety. It only served to unnecessarily violate Americans’ freedoms protected by the First Amendment.”

ADF attorneys representing Greenville’s Temple Baptist Church filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi to challenge the city’s ban, which Greenville Mayor Errick Simmons originally claimed was consistent with a statewide shelter-in-place order issued by Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves. The governor’s order, however, includes no such ban and identifies churches as an “essential business or operation.” Reeves also made public statements saying that drive-in church services were acceptable under his

order.
The lawsuit came about after members of Temple Baptist Church drove to the church’s parking lot on a Wednesday night and stayed in their cars, as the church instructed, with their windows rolled up while listening to Pastor Arthur Scott preach a sermon over a low-power FM radio frequency from a microphone inside the empty church building. Despite the fact that no one left their cars, which numbered fewer than 20, eight uniformed police officers arrived at the service and issued tickets of \$500 per person for violating the mayor’s ban.

The church has been conducting drive-in church services in an effort to respect social-distancing recommendations from federal, state, and local authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nathan Kellum, one of more than 3,100 attorneys allied with ADF, is serving as local counsel in the case on behalf of the church.

Alliance Defending Freedom is an alliance-building, non-profit legal organization that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith.



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By Janet Wise

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