



Rep. Wes Cantrell
R-22

Biography

Wes Cantrell was born in Augusta. In 1966, the Cantrell family settled in Sandy Springs. “The Braves moved to Atlanta and the Falcons had their first season in 1966. I was 5, and I was convinced the Braves and Falcons both came to Atlanta because of me,” recounts Wes.

Growing up in Georgia was truly a great privilege. Georgians are so down to earth and humble in their nature. Families in the neighborhood Wes grew up looked out for one another, and a real sense of community provided a good foundation for his family. His parents, Wes and Bernadine Cantrell, raised Wes to appreciate faith as the most important priority of a family. They were honest, hard-working people who were heavily involved in both church and community.

While attending Riverwood High School, Wes sensed a higher calling on his life. Many mission trips and summers volunteering at camps for his church saw Wes develop a commitment to ministry as a vocation. He simply wouldn’t be satisfied or fulfilled without heeding that call to service. In 1982, Wes graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in Industrial Management at 20 years old and immediately travelled to Fort Worth, TX to start classes the following Monday at Southwestern Seminary. Cantrell joked, “I got asked many times if my dad was a professor at the school because I didn’t look like the typical student. I grew a mustache but it didn’t seem to help so I shaved it off.” Wes received his Masters of Divinity and became the Youth Pastor at the Fairview Baptist Church in Columbus, MS in 1985.

After returning from a six week mission trip in Uganda, Wes set about accomplishing the one thing on his mind – convincing the woman of his dreams to marry him. Jane Thomassian said “Yes to Wes” the day after his 24th birthday. They married on February 22, 1986 and “28 years later, Jane is still the woman of my dreams. I’m more in love with her today than ever before,” Wes says. After 7 years in Columbus, Wes, Jane, and their young son moved to Woodstock when Wes became the Associate Pastor of Student Ministries at Piedmont Baptist Church in Marietta. Together, they would welcome another son and their first daughter in the next three years.

Wes took his role as a minister to young community members very seriously, and took an active role in the local schools. Upon moving to Woodstock, Wes immediately made appointments with school principals to offer any assistance they might need. He regularly ate lunch with students at school to constantly remain engaged and active with those young people he worked with on a regular basis.

In 1997, Wes helped start an organization called First Priority in metro Atlanta. First Priority's goal was to build networks of churches in a community that would then serve the schools of their community. First Priority also trained middle and high school students to organize and lead equal access clubs on their public school campuses which would provide them with a platform from which they could share their faith. This organization grew exponentially over the next several years. Hundreds of campuses were being helped by churches and had student-led clubs on them that were really making a difference.

During this time, Wes started teaching health through a program sponsored by the Cobb County Commission on Children & Youth called Positive Choices. Wes taught in all 27 public middle schools of Cobb County at that time. For seven years, Wes taught abstinence education to 8th grade boys, led multi-media school assemblies, and presented parent programs in all Cobb County middle schools and even some of the high schools. "I met a lot of the greatest people on the planet – public school teachers."

In 1999, Wes and Jane were one of the three founding families of The King's Academy in Woodstock. King's is a hybrid school where students are educated at the school 2 days a week and at home 3 days a week. This became a very effective model of education for hundreds of families. The school has grown and expanded over the years to now have over 800 students. King's graduates have attended colleges all over Georgia, the Air Force Academy, West Point, and many others. Wes has served as Chairman of the school since its inception.

During the 9 years that Wes served as Executive Director of First Priority, the Cantrell Family became members of a great church – Woodstock First Baptist. Wes taught Sunday School to middle school aged students, became a Deacon, and volunteered to serve any way possible. In the fall of 2006, the church asked Wes to serve as the Young Adult Pastor working primarily with married couples under the age of 40.

Wes has deep roots in education. His grandfather was the principal of the school in Free Home and his grandmother was a teacher there as well in the 20's. His grandfather was principal of many schools including Ball Ground Elementary in the early 40's. Wes' mother was appointed by Governor Joe Frank Harris to the State Board of Education in the 80's. Wes taught seven years in the Cobb County School System, and even now one of his sons attends KSU preparing to be a teacher and coach.

“I have now lived in the Woodstock community for the past 22 years. I’ve seen it grow tremendously. As great as the history of House District 22 is, I’m convinced that our best days are ahead of us. We have a legacy of statesmanship from the late Calvin Hill that provides us an example to emulate. His passing left a deep void. Although I cannot hope to fill that void as Calvin would have, I hope to use his service as a lesson on how I should serve,” Wes said.