

## Community looks to revive prayer

By Michael Stone

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Circled around the pavilion at Veterans Memorial Park in Soddy-Daisy on Wednesday evening, a crowd of several hundred listened as preachers and musicians conveyed the need for a "revival" of prayer in the area.

"Prayer has got to be a lifestyle," said Don Oscai, an assistant coach and chaplain for the Soddy-Daisy High School football team. "When it becomes a lifestyle, there's nothing that any superintendent or anybody else can do to prevent that."

Onlookers cheered at Oscai's reference to Hamilton County Schools Superintendent Jim Scales' Oct. 19 decision to ban prayer over loudspeakers at public sporting events and graduations in the county. His decision came after some Soddy-Daisy students complained to the Freedom from Religion Foundation about such prayers.



Scales said Wednesday night in a phone interview that decisions like that are "difficult" but have to be made in accordance with U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

"It's not an anti-prayer decision," he said. "We're just following what has become the law based on court decisions."

He said he supported Wednesday night's gathering.

"As long as it's student-led and we don't have staff involved, that's perfectly acceptable," Scales said.

In attendance was school board member Rhonda Thurman, whose district includes Soddy-Daisy. She has voiced opposition to the ban since the decision earlier this month.

"I'm absolutely opposed to the ban," she said after the event's last prayer. "This country was founded on Judeo-Christian values, and anybody who says any differently is wanting to rewrite American history."

Event organizer Shelton Brown, a 17-year-old Soddy-Daisy High senior, said the students who complained "have every right to say what they want to say."

"I have nothing against them," he said. "When someone had complained, basically I thought, 'I have a part in this and I want to stand up for what God's given me the gift to do, which is stand up for my faith.'"

Brown said those students who complained have been ridiculed "not from me, but from other students."

Both Scales and Thurman said they had not heard of students being picked on.

The school board is scheduled to discuss the issue of prayer at public schools tonight at its meeting.

Those at Wednesday's gathering indicated that a student-led prayer will take place Friday at Soddy-Daisy's home football game against Cleveland without the assistance of a loudspeaker. A similar prayer gathering took place before Soddy-Daisy's last game against Rhea County.

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