

Mayor's Prayer Luncheon: Faith takes the day

'God doesn't force himself on any of us'

By Phil Anderson

The Capital-Journal

By his own admission, Phil Heimlich was an unlikely candidate to embrace the Christian faith.

Since he was 14, Heimlich said, he had his life mapped out, and God wasn't part of the equation.

Heimlich, 50, a Hamilton County commissioner from Cincinnati, discussed his spiritual journey Friday at the 29th annual Mayor's Prayer Luncheon at the Ramada Inn Downtown, 420 S.E. 6th. About 500 people attended the event, which was sponsored by the Christian Business Men's Committee of Topeka.

The son of Dr. Henry Heimlich, founder of the Heimlich maneuver, which has been used to save many from choking, Phil Heimlich said he seemingly had everything going for him by the time he was in his late 20s.

He



Anthony S. Bush/The Capital-Journal

Phil Heimlich, a county commissioner in Ohio, talks about how his life changed after he found God.

Heimlich spoke Friday during the 29th annual Mayor's Prayer Luncheon at the Ramada Inn Downtown. He endured the loneliness of a Connecticut boarding school as a teenager in order to gain admittance to Stanford University, and from there the University of Virginia Law School.

Along the way, he earned the reputation of being a party animal. Yet he lacked the peace he saw in his Christian friends who had a relationship with God.

"I felt empty," he said. "I just felt like life wasn't worth living."

Heimlich sensed a spiritual "tugging," so he began a search for God.

Adding another twist to the story was Heimlich's religious background.

"I'm Jewish," he said. "Jewish people don't talk about Jesus. If I started getting interested in that, what would my family think, and what would my friends who knew I was Jewish think?"

In his research, Heimlich said he found that early followers of Jesus were Jewish, and that they considered following Jesus as "fulfilling their Jewish heritage" rather than rejecting it.

Heimlich's search culminated in 1981 at a Bob's Big Boy restaurant in Michigan, where he said he asked God

to forgive him for his mistakes and accepted Christ as his savior.

Because of his relationship with God, Heimlich said he is a changed person -- content, "less arrogant" and more concerned about others than he used to be.

He said he no longer seeks satisfaction in accomplishments. Rather, he finds it in Christ.

"God doesn't force himself on any of us," Heimlich said. "It's up to us to open that door."

Also making remarks at the luncheon was Acting Mayor Duane Pomeroy, who said a new mayor should be selected within several weeks.

"There's only one person with us who knows who the next mayor will be," Pomeroy said, "and that's God himself."

Audio

Phil Heimlich

[Developing an interest in God](#)

Among the luncheon attendees was former Mayor Butch Felker, who resigned from office on Nov. 6. Felker received a warm ovation from the audience.

Before the luncheon, a number of people shook Felker's hand and offered words of encouragement.

"I believe in this community," Felker said, "and this is one of the community events I always go to."

Phil Anderson can be reached at (785) 295-1195 or phil.anderson@cjonline.com.

PHIL HEIMLICH

Age: 50

Occupation: Vice president, Board of Hamilton County Commissioners, Cincinnati

Birthplace: New York City

Education: Stanford University, University of Virginia Law School

Family: Wife, Rebecca, and son, Henry, 5 1/2 months, both of whom accompanied Heimlich to Friday's luncheon