

Milestones

With Bible study, woman able to reach hundreds

'She's the real deal,' one participant says of class leader.

By **H.M. Cauley**
For the AJC

Nancy McGuirk moved to Atlanta from South Carolina 39 years ago and launched into a career in public relations, advertising and radio. She got married, had four children and enjoyed a busy life, but along with her personal success, she had a drive to learn as much as possible about the Bible.

"I joined Peachtree Presbyterian Church and took almost every class they had to offer," she said with a laugh. "Then they asked me to teach a class."

Though it's been 20 years since McGuirk, 59, first began teaching, she still recalls how anxious she was.

"I prayed for weeks about this class, and I cried the night before!" she said. "I was so nervous, and I didn't know how I'd do it. It was overwhelming. But one morning, I thought, this is one morning a week; I can do that."

McGuirk's first class had 14 also-nervous women. But at the end of the first year, they all signed up to continue for another 12 months.

Before long, word of the class spread, members began bringing friends and neighbors and a waiting list was



For 20 years, Nancy McGuirk has led a women's Bible study group that has grown from 14 to more than 500 members. Participants come from across metro Atlanta to the Wednesday morning sessions. Pat Cahill

started. Finally, McGuirk asked the church if she could extend an invitation to the entire metro Atlanta community.

"The answer was, 'Absolutely,'" she said. "The first day we opened the doors to everyone, 85 women came in. That was 20 years ago, and it's continued to grow from there. We now have women from all over Atlanta, as well as Alpharetta, Buckhead, Marietta and Kennesaw."

Lynn Adams of Sandy Springs joined the group 11 years ago after learning about it from a friend. McGuirk's authenticity and honesty kept her coming back week after week.

"Nancy is authentic;

and fellowship, followed by lunch.

"We start with worship for 20 minutes, then I do a commentary and teach for 20 minutes," McGuirk said. "There's a leadership team that breaks up with groups of all ages. We really try to mix ages and walks of faith so the women can learn from each other. We've found that at the end of the year, most groups don't want to break up; they've become so close."

McGuirk said she and her husband, Terry, jokingly refer to her ministry as "our fifth child." It's a full-time job that includes writing devotionals and study guides. She's currently wrapping up her third book, and she has no plans to slow down. In fact, she's working on new ways to expand her mission.

"I have a wonderful training team, and we're about to start our first regional Bible study conference," she said. "We're also helping many other groups get started, and I continue to be blessed every year, just by being surrounded by such a group of angels."

she speaks from her own experiences as a mom, a wife, from all her walks of life," Adams said. "She's the real deal. She's not pretending to be something she's not. When she speaks, she relates to everyone in the room, and they relate to her. That authenticity attracted me."

McGuirk's Bible study participants now number more than 500, including 100 who live in other parts of Georgia and enjoy her sessions on videotape. Others watch her message online, but the majority of members pour into the Peachtree sanctuary at 9:30 a.m. every Wednesday for two hours of prayer, inspira-

"Milestones" covers significant events and times in the lives of metro Atlantans. Big or small, well-known or not — tell us of a Milestone we should write about. Send information to hm_cauley@yahoo.com; call 404-514-6162; or mail to Milestones, c/o Jamila Robinson, 223 Perimeter Center Parkway N.E., Atlanta, GA 30346.