



The Challenge



December 2007

LINDA MARTIN HAS EYES TO SEE, EARS TO HEAR INJUSTICE



“There are leaders the world needs most”

“We are grateful every day for the leadership of Linda Martin,” said Marty Strange, Policy Director for Rural School and Community Trust, giving these comments at her retirement:

There are those who lead for the sake of the power and glory it brings them. They lead for themselves.

There are those who lead because they are called to lead, and because it comes naturally to them.

There are those who lead when it is easy, or convenient, or charming, where there is no sacrifice.

There are those who lead in desperation, because they have no choice.

But there are few who lead when there is no personal reward in doing so, when leadership is difficult, inconvenient, and even unsatisfying, when they force themselves to wear the mantle of leadership, when they are reviled for leading causes that challenge the powerful, and when the world simply shrugs its shoulders if they chose apathy instead.

There are leaders the world needs most.

They have eyes to see and ears to hear the injustices, the corruption, the indignities.

They are compelled by conscience to lead, and they simply find a way to do what needs to be done.

That’s the kind of leader we find in Linda Martin.

Visit Challenge West Virginia at www.challengewv.org

MARTIN'S PASSION FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION WILL LIVE ON

Challenge WV's Linda Martin has retired, stepping down from the organization she founded in 1998.

Martin's name has become synonymous with the fight to keep community schools open in West Virginia, holding firm with her beliefs and actions that all students have a right to an equitable education.

Her passion could have come from her coal-mining grandfather who stood up at the Battle of Blair Mountain.



Thomas Ramey (shown here with Linda Martin) who has been selected to replace Martin, said "Linda Martin is a living example of a person that uses our democratic process to stand up for the underdog. Linda went from organizing in Lincoln County to being the statewide leader for small school advocates."

"She built Challenge West Virginia through the belief that each person who comes to our table has unique and worthwhile values that deserve respect. Linda is leaving Challenge West Virginia as a strong force to continue to work for the needs of children who live in rural areas," Ramey said.

Rachel B. Tompkins, president of the Rural School and Community Trust, said "Thank Linda Martin for showing us that everyday people can solve hard problems, staying focused on democratic process."

"Thank you for using your creativity, persistence and brain power to ensure that powerful people don't always have the last word," Tompkins said.

Martin was recognized at a special dinner held in Charleston in December.

Barbara Ferraro and Pat Hussey, founders

of Charleston's Covenant House, said Martin values education as the great equalizer, recognizing Challenge WV as a movement for social change.

"For decades you have had a vision for all West Virginians - their hope for a better life and a better community... with a commitment and passion at great personal cost," Ferraro said.

Martin's interest became well known in state education circles during the landmark Recht Decision, that all students have a right to a fair and equitable education.

Martin lived in Lincoln County between 1976-1987, where her three children — Jeff, Elizabeth and Luke — all earned high school diplomas from the former Duval High School.

Martin said she became directly involved in education after discovering "the pitiful conditions" at Griffithsville Elementary School in Lincoln County, where her children were enrolled in the 1980s.

As president of the local PTA, Martin said she went to the principal to discuss the age and deteriorated condition of textbooks in the school, and the lack of adequate school supplies.

"To say I was fighting an uphill battle is an understatement," Martin said, getting little sympathy or support from school administrators.

Martin said "I learned from the experience I had at the time that the only thing state officials were going to do was try to hide the inadequacies and mistakes of local school officials. They were all working hand-in-hand."

Martin's daughter, Elizabeth, speaking at a dinner recognizing her mother, said her mother was her best friend and mentor.

"She taught us love, to be kind, that material things do not bring happiness, that ALL people are equal and all people deserve opportunity, especially educational opportunity," she said.

Elizabeth recalled an incident when she was 10-years-old, when she joined the first-ever girls basketball team. "Mom was told to bake cookies and brownies as a fundraiser for our uniforms," Elizabeth said.

"She asked why my older brother Jeff's uniforms were paid for and ours were not." Martin went to the next PTA meeting and brought up the uniform question, being met with blank stares. She then went to the Lincoln board meeting, repeating her question. The superintendent Charles McCann "condescendingly told her not to worry about things she didn't understand."



A young Martin at work during early years.

"Mom then stood up and quoted Title Nine, after which Mr. McCann was annoyed and told her to sit down and shut up."

"That was a huge mistake," said her daughter.

Eighteen months later, Mr. McCann and two board members found themselves in hot water due to misappropriation of federal funds.

"I learned to never let anyone tell you to sit down and shut up, especially when you are standing up to speak for those who can not represent themselves," she concluded, saying all three children in the family now have college degrees.

Martin said the conditions in Lincoln County schools were "outrageous," so she formed a local group called Parents for Better Schools.

That organization became involved in educational issues, including consolidation.

Martin formed the West Virginia Education Project, which she hoped to organize into a statewide effort to give parents more say in the operation of public schools. That movement evolved into Challenge WV.

Martin, the first member of her coal mining family to graduate from college, went to Marshall University, where she became a member of the faculty and taught sociology. She later was affiliated with the Highlander Education Center.

She said, "Thomas Jefferson was right. Citizens have to get a good education to be able to properly participate in democracy. I am convinced that is correct and I have been motivated to see that every child gets a chance at an equal education."

"A child's world starts at home, in a community, a place on the earth. It is at that place where education, vision, courage and critical thinking begins," she said, admonishing educators for placing young children

(continued on page 3)

STATE SCHOOLS GET ANOTHER "F" FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE

In the complicated world of quantifying and reporting educational achievement, two recent reports give widely divergent impressions of achievement by West Virginia schools and students.

A new national study gives the state's school children an F for classroom achievement, while praising educators for developing policy.

Education Week's "Quality Counts 2008" says West Virginia's 8th graders rank 47th in math and 43rd in reading. Fourth graders rank 40th in reading and math.

The rankings are based on student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test.

West Virginia also earned a C-minus grade in student chance for success -- among the five worst states.

The report also notes that West Virginia's eighth-graders rank 50th, worst in the nation for improvement.

The state's high marks for accountability standards and its financial equity policy counterbalance the low achievement numbers to help the state earn an overall grade of B-minus, according to the report.

The state's administrators continue to rank among the best in America in policy

matters.

"Quality Counts 2008" joins a number of other national reports that put the Mountain State near the bottom in educational outcomes.

State School superintendent Steve Paine has embarked on significant changes that allow most West Virginia schools to pass No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards, while indicating in 2009 the state will increase student requirements for achievement exceeding NCLB standards.

Meanwhile, in-state WVReport.com has released its annual ranking of the best public high schools in West Virginia, using statistics from the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the Community and Technical College System of West Virginia.

The WVReport program gives top high schools gold, silver and bronze ratings.

The site's ranking system uses statistics like dropout rates, percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers, percentage of students who took ACT, and the rate of students who go to college. Most WV schools failed to reach NCLB standards.

TOP 20 STATE HIGH SCHOOLS

1 Bridgeport Harrison 100.00, 2 Williamstown Wood 97.67, 3 Fairmont Senior Marion 95.82, 4 Hundred Wetzel 93.66, 5 Tyler Tyler 88.07, 6 Ritchie Ritchie 87.51, 7 Pendleton Pendleton 86.97, 8 Magnolia Wetzel 86.34, 9 Paw Paw Morgan 85.79, 10 Paden City Wetzel 85.59, 11 Elkins Randolph 85.57, 12 Wahama Mason 83.50, 13 Matewan Mingo 82.84, 14 Ravenswood Jackson 81.99, 15 Cameron Marshall 81.93, 16 Harman Randolph 81.91, 17 Wirt Wirt 81.54, 18 Brooke Brooke 81.15, 19 Winfield Putnam 80.80, 20 Williamson Mingo 79.66.

LOWEST 20 HIGH SCHOOLS

102 Hannan Mason 46.31, 103 Woodrow Wilson Raleigh 45.64, 104 Riverside Kanawha 45.05, 105 Preston Preston 44.82, 106 Westside Wyoming 44.36, 107 Harts Lincoln 44.34, 108 Point Pleasant Mason 43.77, 109 Big Creek McDowell 43.37, 110 Grafton Taylor 43.06, 111 Princeton Mercer 42.82, 112 Duval Lincoln 42.76, 113 Iae-ger McDowell 42.03, 114 Mount View McDowell 41.39, 115 Hampshire Hampshire 40.97, 116 Mount Hope Fayette 39.56, 117 Jefferson County Jefferson 39.41, 118 Gilbert Mingo 38.88, 119 Musselman Berkeley 38.57, 120 Sherman Boone 34.20, 121 Liberty Raleigh 33.68, 122 Montcalm Mercer 28.15.

SBA SEEKING TO SELL BONDS FOR SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

The state's School Building Authority is looking at selling bonds to pay for school construction projects in West Virginia.

Mark Manchin, the Executive Director of the SBA, says the response has been guarded, but still positive to the idea, which will be presented to the legislature in January.

Thomas Ramey, Challenge's new coordinator, said Challenge would consider supporting the bond sale if money was designated to repair and revamp existing community schools.

"There are well over 100 elementary schools on the list for closure," Ramey said.

"We have delayed the selection process for this cycle of need projects in anticipation of introducing the legislation and, hopefully, being successful," Manchin said.

Manchin says 43 school construction projects have been proposed throughout West Virginia, costing \$250 million. The SBA has only \$50 million to allocate.

He says selling bonds could possibly generate between \$100 million and \$135 mil-

lion over three years.

Delayed construction or remodeling has allowed costs to skyrocket.

In 2004, Manchin says it cost \$6.4 million to build a basic elementary school. Today's cost, for that same school, is almost \$10 million.

Manchin says an average size high school costs \$40 million, almost all of the total amount the SBA currently has in its budget.



Challenge WV fellows work on Christmas give-aways at Covenant House

PASSION...

(continued from page 2)

on long bus rides several hours a day.

Martin said her replacement, Thomas Ramey, is one of the state's outstanding young leaders.

"Thomas will be a key person in the organization as it moves ahead," she concluded.



Tammi Stollings (left) representing Gov. and Mrs. Joe Manchin, presents special recognition to Martin (center) during December dinner, Thomas Ramey (right)

The Challenge

The Challenge is published monthly by Challenge West Virginia, a statewide organization, committed to maintaining and improving small community schools.

Challenge West Virginia's goal is to reform education in the Mountain State so that citizens have a voice in policy decisions and every child has the opportunity to receive a first-class education and the promise of a bright future.



Challenge West Virginia

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We Support Small Schools!

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