



The West Virginia Challenge

July 1999

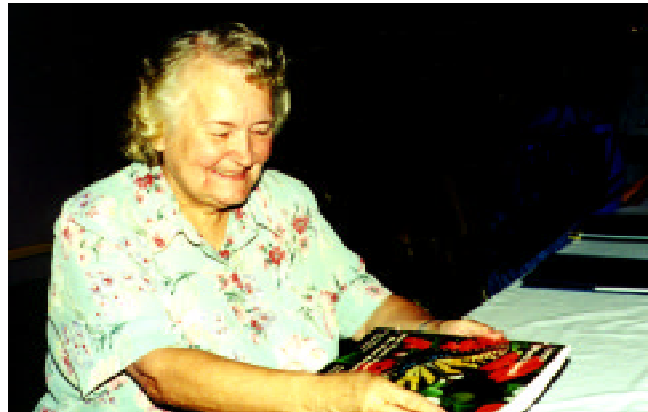


Methodists support shorter bus rides

At its Annual Conference in June, the West Virginia United Methodist Church ratified a resolution calling for a law limiting school bus travel times for students.

The resolution was the work of Amelia Anderson, a Challenge West Virginia mentor from Webster County, a former member of the Webster County Board of Education and a member of Jerry Run United Methodist Church of the Hacker Valley Charge.

"When I learned students in my home county of Webster were on a school bus for three to four hours a day, I felt it was an isolated situation," Mrs. Anderson told Conference members. "When I joined Challenge



Challenge WV mentor Amelia Anderson of Webster County led support for the resolution adopted by the WV Conference of the United Methodist Church.

West Virginia, I learned many rural counties had students on buses for long periods of time.

"I feel the state of West Virginia should establish a law concerning the time a student spends on a school bus one way," she said. "There are recommendations, but they are not law and are often ignored. This law should include that the School Building Authority must consider bus travel times before new school building projects are funded."

Mrs. Anderson said research by Challenge West Virginia showed that many counties have children on school buses between three and four hours each day. Every time a school is lost to consolidation, more chil-

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Project to demonstrate what small schools can do

Marshall University Rural Education scholars are partnering with tiny Hannan Junior Senior High School in southern Mason County to demonstrate that with a little technology and expertise, small schools can actually educate rural students better than some of the state's large consolidated schools.

When the three-year study is completed, Dr. Stan Maynard, a professor at Marshall, told *Charleston Gazette-Mail* reporter Tara Tuckwiller he hopes to have a model that communities and school districts can follow to build and sustain top-quality small schools.

"This will have an impact on rural education in West Virginia, maybe nationally," Maynard told Tuckwiller. "This will be something the state can learn from."

Hannan parents waged a long battle to save the

school of less than 300 students, which graduates only about 30 students each year. One of those parents, Shirley Gue, was elected to the Mason County Board of Education last year. She told Tuckwiller, "Unfortunately, once a school is marked for consolidation, administrators take the mental stand that they're not going to spend another penny on that school."

Mrs. Gue maintains that Hannan is necessary because some children already are on buses more than an hour and a half one way just to get there. But the school also offers something very basic to its students. "These children know their existence is important to someone," she said. "Being known by their name, not their ID number. For a lot of children, the only place they get that is

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Challenge West Virginia

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

Challenge members believe that the policy direction being pursued by education officials in the state, which has involved the closing of many small schools, does not serve the best interest of many chil-

dren, especially those from low-income families who live in rural areas.

If you would like to become involved in Challenge WV, please contact one of the fellows listed on page three or Linda Martin or Beth Spence, whose numbers are listed on the back page.

Challenge is a program of Covenant House, an independent, non-profit organization in Charleston, WV, which is not connected to any other program by the same name.

Editor of **The West Virginia Challenge** is Beth Spence.



This 'n that

- A Census Bureau report states that West Virginians spend \$55.38 on education for every \$1,000 in personal income, the third highest rate in the country.

The study, which, according to the Associated Press, was based on 1996 public elementary and secondary schools, shows that West Virginia spent \$5,830 per student in federal, state and local money combined, placing it 18th in the country for overall education spending. The national average is \$5,656.

- Child poverty in West Virginia has grown by 62.2 percent since 1980, according to a report by the WV KIDS COUNT Fund. "Poverty has many deadly faces," said KIDS COUNT Fund President Kenna Seal. "Deadly faces include ill health, depression, and at the kindergarten age, children who are not ready for school. Many teachers say they can predict in the kindergarten year which children will drop out of school when they get older."

- *Rural Policy Matters*, the newsletter of The Rural Challenge Policy Program, cites a 1977 study by the New Jersey Schools Boards Association, which found that size was the most important predictor of school violence. In particular, schools that held more than their capacity, exceeded a size limit and/or had classes of more than 27 students were at risk.

- West Virginia Gov. Cecil Underwood in May dedicated a one-room school in Tyler County which has been converted into an Electronic Campus with the latest in educational technology and distance learning. "In the one-room school I attended here in Tyler County, we were lucky to have one teacher," Underwood said.

"Now people in all parts of West Virginia . . . can take courses from their homes or offices offered by some of the most outstanding professors." The Electronic Campus, launched 18 months ago, offers more than 2,000 courses through the Internet.

- County school boards are the largest employers in 35 of West Virginia's 55 counties, the second largest employer in 14 other counties and rank no lower than fourth place for all remaining counties, according to an Associated Press report.

- Ritchie County parents sponsored a public forum in early June to protest the proposed closure of five elementary schools, which would leave the county with only one large elementary. Ritchie County has one high school and one middle school. Since the public forum, school officials have indicated they are reconsidering the one elementary school plan, parents say.

- Putnam County's Confidence Elementary also may escape the chopping block. The County's Vision 20/20 Committee backed off from a recommendation to merge the county's two smallest elementary schools after parents rose up in support of Confidence. The 20/20 Committee cited the long bus rides students would be facing in recommending that a new school be built at Confidence.

- Kanawha County School Board members are planning to close between six and twelve schools by the fall of 2000, according to *The Charleston Gazette*. At a public hearing to discuss their 10-year school facilities plan, Board members said they won't vote for new schools and they won't approve major renovations to existing schools. "We're not interested in spending a lot of money," said board member Pete Thaw. "We want to consolidate and close so we can improve curriculum."

Methodists . . .

dren have to endure longer bus travel times.

“West Virginia has many rural counties,” Mrs. Anderson said. “Many of our poorer families live in the rural counties where children have long bus rides.

“When children attend school so far from their homes, many students cannot take part in extra curricular activities like they did in their smaller rural schools. Some of these students feel out of place, like poor country cousins,” she said.

“We hear it takes a village to raise a child, but many parents cannot travel the additional miles to stay involved in their children’s schooling.

Project . . .

at school.”

Maynard has followed research showing that rural children learn better in small community schools. “I believe a lot of children who get lost in the shuffle in bigger schools can be identified and worked with in smaller schools,” he said.

With Marshall’s help and the support of its local administration, Hannan will offer distance learning through satellite classes. Marshall will train teachers in new technologies and methods.

Members of the community, many of whom were involved in bitter anti-consolidation fights,

These parents cannot volunteer, assist or attend activities at a distant school.”

Mrs. Anderson said many members of the West Virginia Conference of United Methodists were shocked to learn that students were on school buses for so long each day.

She said she expects the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to address the issues raised in the resolution.

The Church and Society Board said in its report it “sees the need for our Annual Conference and society to address the large issue of public education in our state, including funding, busing, consolidation and quality of life and learning.”

will be involved in rebuilding and maintaining the school.

“It’s put up or shut up now,” parent Darlena Long told other parents. “We’ve fought consolidation all this time. Now we’ve got our school and we’ve got to show what we can do with it.”

Maynard told Tucker that to make it work at Hannan, everybody has to be in on the act – parents, students, teachers, business people, the county school board and higher education. “This must be a model so anyone can do it,” he said. “That will be Hannan’s legacy.”

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