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Harrisonburg
High School
reading
specialist
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Nikki Fox / DN-R



Reading Passion Leads To Career

Foundation Names Powell Retired Teacher Of The Year

By **JEFF MELLOTT**
Daily News-Record

MOUNT SOLON — In 1996, Eunice Ann Powell retired from Harrisonburg High School as a reading specialist.

While Powell has spent some of her retirement on the Outer Banks in North Carolina, she's also found time to volunteer at North River Elementary School in Augusta County. And, she began reading to her grandchildren the day they came home from the hospital.

On Wednesday, the Harrisonburg Education Foundation named Powell, 71, its retired outstanding teacher of the year.

Core Requirement

Powell was involved with numerous programs during her 24 years at the high school.

Whenever a program started, the principal assigned Powell, as reading specialist, to the team to make it work.

In the early 1990s, the high school implemented CORE, an alternative education plan for at-risk students that would become The Blue Streak Academy.

"We would love them and hug them and push them and get them to graduate," said Powell, the program's director and one of its teachers.

"That's the most wonderful way to end a career," Powell said at her home recently, "by helping people who would not make it without you."

Sherri Chapman, a business and information technology teacher at Harrisonburg High School, remembered working with Eunice during the program's start.

"With her poise, integrity and character," Chapman said during the award presentation, "we pulled through that first year."

Powell knew how to motivate students, Chapman told her audience at James Madison University.

"She was determined that CORE graduates would not only be literate but also leave Harrisonburg High School with a love of reading," Chapman said.

Maintaining Control

Sometimes, however, Powell had to deal with adults in the evening program.

Bill Powell, Eunice's husband, remembers an occasion when an angry man threw a chair.

Before Bill could respond, Eunice calmly took the man by the arm and gently escorted him out.

"When she said something, that was it," said Bill, 74, a retired business education teacher at James Madison University.

Coming To the Valley

Bill and Eunice came to the Shenandoah Valley after he completed his doctorate at the University of Pittsburgh.

The couple came to the Valley in 1971

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Powell Says Career As Teacher Is Still Rewarding

Powell

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when Bill took a job at James Madison University in 1971. Eunice, who had earned her reading certificate in Pennsylvania, joined Harrisonburg High School in 1972.

They commuted from their home in Mount Solon.

Along with her job, she helped rear their two children — Andy and Abby — and she completed her doctorate at the University of Virginia.

“She never gets discour-

aged,” Bill said.

Career Path

With all the distractions, Eunice never lost the focus on her desire to become a teacher. “That’s all I wanted to do,” she recalled.

She started down that path in elementary school in Dayton, Ohio.

After reading Gertrude Chandler Warner’s mystery “The Boxcar Children” in the fourth grade, she became a reader.

Now, she gives copies of the book away. She hopes it inspires others to love reading.

Rewarding Result

Powell’s career as a teacher continues to reward her.

One of her proudest moments occurred last year when she encountered a former student at a city restaurant.

The student had struggled in class. Despite CORE’s best efforts, he left school without graduating, Powell said.

The former student, however, told Powell that he credited CORE for inspiring him to complete the General Educational Development diploma.

After he carried his food to his table, the former student pulled out a book and began to read, she recalled.

“As I left, I touched him on the shoulder and said, ‘And, thank God he is a reader, too.’”

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