

under the sun

Principal Corley Wants Graduates Proud Of West

BY SUSAN USHER

Mountaineers would describe David Corley as "a long drink of water."

The Pittsburgh, Pa., native stands lean and lanky, with the easy, muscular grace of an athlete, a grace that belies the energy underneath the skin and muscle and bone—an energy reflected in his eyes.

His goal as West Brunswick High School's new principal is simple: "The thing that would make me feel good at the end of the year is for students to have respect for their school and be proud of the education they receive," he said.

"I'd like for them to say, 'It was tough; they expected a lot, but I made it. I'm really proud I was a student at West Brunswick High School.'"

That respect has to be earned, he added. The graduate, the student, has to feel the school has given him direction, the academic or work-related skills he needs as a foundation for the future.

Reaching Corley's goal will require some of the finesse of a juggler on his part, a balancing act that includes parents, administrators, faculty members, students and the community at large.

While he hadn't had much contact with parents at the first of the school year and is still learning his way around the community, both faculty and students impress Corley.

He said there are a great number of teachers at West who "work hard and care a great deal about students."

As for the students, Corley sees promise.

"There's a healthy attitude. Maybe it's newness, but they seem to have a healthy respect for authority. Without that there's not much opportunity for learning to take place."

The kids also are friendly, he added, with a "harmony" among the student body apparent.

"That's the kind of thing you need to keep regenerating," he continued. "These are good kids; they come from good homes. They want to respect authority."

He seeks a balance of interests at the school.

A six-foot, four-inch basketball standout at West View High School who entered Ohio Wesleyan on a partial basketball scholarship, Corley appreciates the importance of an athletic program. But the former coach wants the same kind of community support for the school's academic program and for the arts as exists for revenue sports such as football and basketball.

This includes generating increased student interest in advanced classes and perhaps putting on something like a schoolwide musical.

Whatever the specifics, he notes, "This is the community's school. We will be as successful as the community is supportive."

He anticipates a partnership of sorts within the school, developing the Student Government Association into a real voice for students that can work with the administration to study together things the school wants to do.

He also will work in tandem with the faculty, relying heavily on their knowledge of the students, the community and the school and giving them the opportunity to grow individually and as professionals by taking on increased responsibilities, particularly at the departmental level.

"I'll be pulling from them the direction the school needs to go. It's not a question of what the school's leadership wants, but what the organization needs—how to get from where we are to where we want to go."

In his own life, Corley follows a similar mapping plan, pulling together the experiences he needs to reach his career goal of someday serving as a superintendent of schools.

West's new leader grew up in Pittsburgh, the son of a man who gave up a post as a university dean of men to go into labor relations as a management representative.

"He got out of education because he couldn't support his family the way he wanted to," said Corley, the oldest of the closeknit family's three boys.

With that lesson firmly in mind, Corley had not planned to become an educator. After a senior year at the University of Pittsburgh, he applied for and was accepted at Pitt's dental school.

Instead, Corley found himself accepting a friend's request to help out at a private school near Norfolk, Va. He taught sixth grade without a teaching certificate and coached basketball and football while considering his future in dentistry or medicine.

"I was having such a good time teaching and working with the kids I never got back to dental school," Corley said.

Instead he began work on a master's in education at William & Mary, where a professor urged him into school administration. He worked for 12 years as an elementary and junior high principal and assistant high school principal and earned his doctorate in education, working in York County near Williamsburg.

When his old boss moved to Harrisonburg as superintendent, Corley went along as assistant superintendent in charge of instruction, a post he held four years while learning how much he didn't know about administration.

"I had moved up the ladder quickly," he recalled, "but I didn't have the experience or age to be a superintendent."

So he moved out of education temporarily to gain a different kind of experience, selling corrugated box containers to industrial clientele.

"It was a valuable experience," he said, one with skills that carry over into his job as administrator.

"Education is a selling experience. A superintendent must sell a good educational product."

Corley also believes in packaging his educational product in the best possible light.

He returned to Virginia, to Winchester near the West Virginia line, as a principal, but not for long.

After hearing North Carolina's Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction, Dudley Flood, speak on several occasions, he decided to move south.

"I felt Virginia was going to stall out, that it was on a plateau in terms of local contributions to education," he said. "Flood impressed me with the state and its future directions."

That contact with Flood led him to accept the principalship of Polk Central High, a school of about 650 students in grades seven through 12, located in Polk County near Hendersonville and Tryon.

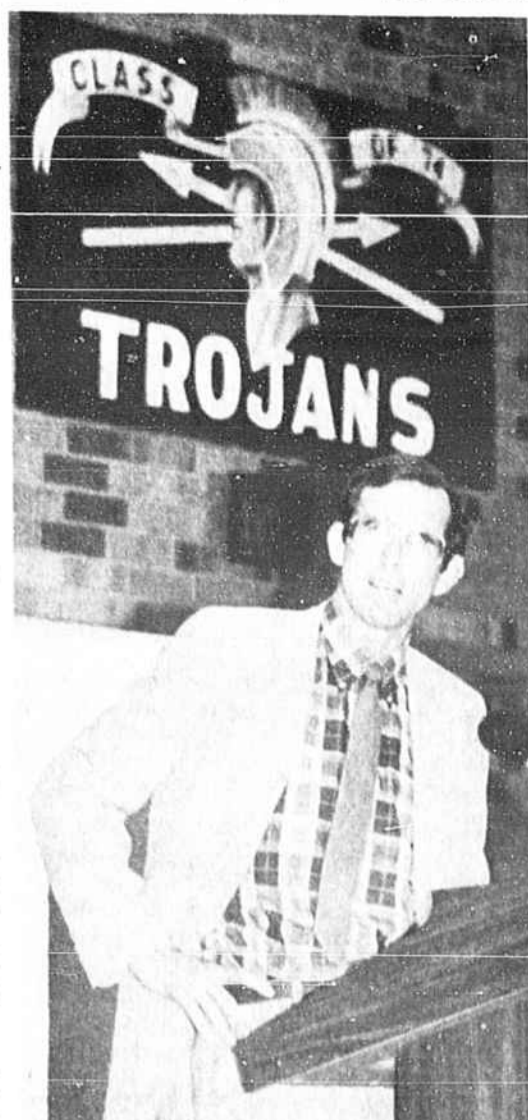
Corley and his son, Ben, 13, are living in a condominium at Ocean Isle Beach, while the rest of the family stays behind in Columbus, N.C. Ben is a student at Shalotte Middle.

Corley's wife, Doris, is an executive secretary to a consulting firm, and his daughter, Sarah, plays volleyball and basketball at Polk Central, where she is a junior.

Not wanting to leave her friends, "She'll stay there as long as she has the choice," said Corley.

Of the Polk schools, he recalled from his arrival there, "They needed a great deal." He likened the divisions and internal strife in the system to past occurrences in the Brunswick school system. In Polk, he indicated, the political infighting centered around an extended day pilot program.

After two years at Polk Central, he applied for the principal's job at West. "Polk County's assistant



DAVID CORLEY, the new principal at West Brunswick High School, wants to encourage student pride in the school—and to see that graduates get the kind of education they can brag about.

superintendent had applied for the position Ed Lemon has now and he was impressed with the system."

"I do want to become a superintendent—at some time. As an assistant superintendent I learned I like being around students. I want to be where things are happening."

He also learned that he likes being in a "line position"—principal or superintendent, because they not only carry out ideas, they make the major decisions in a school system.

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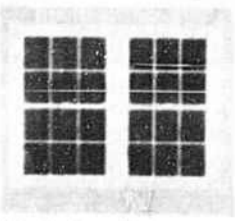


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