

Yvonne Bright Pursues Life With Zeal

BY SUSAN USHER

"Late to bed and early to rise."
That's the way Yvonne Lewis Bright describes her typical day.

It's a direct reflection of her vigorous approach to living, motivated by her beliefs and a desire to make changes.

A woman of strong personal convictions and a sense of mission, the new District 5 representative on the Brunswick County Board of Education works hard for anything to which she commits herself, whether it's Dixie League ball, her job at Federal Paper Board Co., doll collecting or the school board.

She maintains a tight schedule that attempts to balance family, work, church and community interests. She believes in the adage, "If you want something done, give it to a busy person."

Her new responsibilities with the school board have involved more hours than she had anticipated, but Mrs. Bright is tackling the job with enthusiasm and no regrets.

"I'm a real active person anyway," she said in a recent interview. "I'm up real early and I stay up late at night. Once you get the adrenaline going it's a shame you have to go to bed."

After making the commitment a year ago to run for the school board as a Republican candidate, she threw herself into the effort. To gain election she would have to unseat a popular incumbent, James "Jimbo" Clemmons, retired principal of Lincoln Primary School and a five-year member of the school board who died suddenly earlier this month.

The campaign reflected Mrs. Bright's persistence. She attended candidates' forums before the May primary even though she was unopposed for the nomination. Considered a dark horse candidate, she came from behind in November to win on a results-oriented platform that emphasizes a return to the three R's, greater classroom discipline and renewed emphasis on academic excellence and the work ethic.

She told voters she thought board members should stand up for what they believe in. "If one member has a firm belief in something, I don't think they should be nullified by the rest of the board," she said in an October 1990 interview. "I think you should try to explain your position and win them over to your side, especially if it's in the interest of education."

Now she's redirecting the energy spent on campaigning into learning her new responsibilities and learning how to work within the system for the changes she believes are in order.

"I have a real concern about how you get a handle on a basic education," she said. "There are so many other things we have to deal with first. It takes a long time to make change. But I really hope we can improve the quality of education in Brunswick County."

In December the board reorganized into committees in an effort to get more done. Mrs. Bright was named to the long-range planning and policy committees. "It means a lot more meetings," she said. "I've already dipped into vacation time."

But she's enjoying the opportunity of serving the school system where she was educated. Mrs. Bright was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and reared in Brunswick County, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Lewis of Winnabow. She attended Bolivia High School and Miller Motte Business College in Wilmington, and worked a variety of jobs before she and her husband, David, settled in Leland. He is employed at nearby DuPont. She went to work at Federal in 1968.

Mementos of her past efforts and interests surround Mrs. Bright as she chats in the den of her home on Mt. Misery Road, the house family members helped the Brights build 20 years ago. Collector quality dolls rest on the steps and in nearby cabinets. A certificate lauds her work on behalf of the Republican Party. Photographs, trophies and an unusual wall clock attest to her work with National Dixie Youth National League softball over the years at the local, state and national level.

But Yvonne Bright said the He's First bumper sticker on her car reflects her first priority. She lives and acts on her beliefs, and supports her church, New Jerusalem Outreach. "I think church attendance is something that should be automatic," she said. "Not, 'Are we going this week?'"

She travels frequently with her daughter-in-law, Lorraine, a gospel singer.

Linking all she does: a concern for family and traditional values.

Her work with Dixie Youth was a natural outgrowth of her sons' involvement in sports. They're grown now—David Jr. is a filter plant operator at



YVONNE BRIGHT pauses daily for a quiet visit with her next door neighbor, friend and brother-in-law, Joseph Marion Coston. A sudden illness left him quadriplegic.



DISTRICT 5 BOARD OF EDUCATION member Yvonne Bright responds to a friend's teasing as she points to keepsakes of her various pursuits, including this Dixie Softball anniversary clock.

Federal Paper Board Co. and Scott a deputy sheriff in New Hanover County. But she's still in Dixie League after 11 years, having served as state director and now national secretary for the 11-state organization. In 1979 she was instrumental in bringing the League's World Series to Leland. And, from the rear of her laundry room she runs the league's supply center, dispensing rule books, patches and other materials on demand.

"It really starts in January, with calling and ordering things," she said, followed by a last-minute rush as the season nears. "They know they can't put the girls on the field without the shoulder patches, but they wait until the night before the season begins to call. Then they want overnight delivery and they may pay more for shipping than the patches cost."

Even after a late night, she's a morning person. Mrs. Bright likes getting off to an early start at Federal's technical division office where she is secretary. After 20 years in the same office, she says she still enjoys her

work and work team. At Federal she also serves as treasurer for the Employees Benefit Association, handling business such as sick claims.

Her experiences on the job as well as in the community helped convince her of the need for change in education and in the role of the family.

"One thing I see that reflects on the schools and on families is the values of workers who are hired. Students need to be taught to do quality work and to do it to the best of their ability," she said. "We just have to get back to doing quality work and being dependable and being responsible. I truly think it stems from the family."

Her concerns as a parent, taxpayer and school board member are similar: She wants to find new ways of reaching parents and showing them why it is important to get involved in their children's education and she wants to find ways to motivate students to want to learn.

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