

Home-Grown Teachers

Waccamaw Natives Nurture Community School Tradition

BY DOUG RUTTER

Waccamaw School has a special place in Thelma Little's heart. It's where she learned her ABCs as a young girl. It's where she received her diploma. And it's where she has taught for the last 28 years.

Little is one of 10 Waccamaw Elementary School teachers who grew up in the Ash community and are now giving something back by helping carry on the "community school" tradition.

"I graduated from Waccamaw School in 1962, went to East Carolina for four years and came back to Waccamaw and have been here ever since. That's it in a nutshell," Little explained last week.

"I thought I had something I could give back to the community. I have a lot of pride for my school," she added.

Jill Hughes, who teaches math to seventh and eighth graders, says she feels like she's spent her whole life at Waccamaw School.

Her mother, Muriel Bennett, taught math at the school for 32 years and didn't retire until her daughter was ready to take her place. Hughes has the same classroom—and the same desk—as her mother did.

Judy Evans, another Waccamaw High graduate, said she's never had any desire to teach anywhere else.

"I like the closeness of the community. When something happens to one of the children here you feel like it's part of your own family," she said. "I think it's a true community school. I think the people feel that way and are proud of their school."

Principal Bill Shoemaker says the "home-grown" teachers make Waccamaw unique among the Brunswick County Schools. "This is probably one of the last of the vanishing breed of community schools," he said.

"I think one of the biggest advantages is the teachers know a lot of the kids and their families. They know what might work with one child or parent that wouldn't work with another."

The teachers agree that living and working in a small community where everybody knows just about everybody else is an advantage when it comes to dealing with students and parents.

Little grew up with the grandparents of some of the children she has in her fourth grade class. "I'm now teaching the children of some of the parents that I taught when they were in school," she said.

Sixth-grade teacher Brenda Russ worked in the tobacco fields of Longwood with some of the parents of her students.

"They don't give me the problems they give others because I know where they live and I'll go to their



WACCAMAW SCHOOL TEACHERS who grew up in the Ash community include (seated, from left) Judy Evans, Jill Hughes, Ellen Milligan, Barbara Evans, Thelma Little, (standing, from left) Brenda Russ, Brenda Stanley, Leslie Stanley and Michael Stanley.

home," Russ said. "They know me and they know what I stand for."

Leslie Stanley, a student at Waccamaw School just a few years ago, is now in her third year as a teacher. She admits it was strange at first, working side by side with teachers like Judy Evans and Jill Hughes who used to grade her homework.

"When I first came here, I still wanted to refer to them as Miss Evans and Miss Hughes," Stanley said. "Mr. Chestnut used to be my gym teacher and I still can't call him by his first name. He'll always be Mr. Chestnut."

"I have close family ties to this community," Stanley added. "I applied for various schools in the area, but I held out for Waccamaw. It feels like I've come full circle."

Michael Stanley worked in the restaurant business for 10 years before becoming a teacher. For the last five years, he has taught language arts and science at Waccamaw and coached football and baseball.

"I felt I had an obligation to myself to do something that would make me feel good about myself while at the same time giving something back to the community," he said.

Stanley was part of the first group of black students to attend Waccamaw School after integration.

"I find that a lot of kids I deal with on a daily basis, I went to school with their parents or know their parents. It really benefits the school-community relationship," he said.

"I think being a close-knit community we can relate

to certain things and we don't have a lot of problems that the larger schools have," Stanley said.

Barbara Evans, who graduated from the eighth grade Waccamaw, says the school is a community in itself.

"It's my community. I'm right down the road and I wanted to be close," said Evans, a special education teacher who worked for six years at West Brunswick High before transferring to Waccamaw.

Shoemaker says students seem to have more respect for teachers if they live in the community where they teach.

"I think that's one of the reasons we have very few discipline problems," he said. "It's a lot easier to pick up the phone and call somebody you know than somebody you don't know."

Military Vehicle Display To Commemorate WWII At Ft. Fisher



MORE THAN 6,000 troops trained at Fort Fisher during World War II.

Usually known for its Civil War history, Fort Fisher State Historic Site will be home to a program Nov. 6-7 interpreting the other war in which the fort was used.

Approximately eight World War II vintage military vehicles will be on display ranging from Jeeps to large 6 X 6 trucks. A special part of the program will be a working, fully-restored half track.

Staff members and volunteers dressed as GI's will be on hand with a display of World War II uniforms and equipment. Weapons on display will include many different types of rifles, a flame-thrower, a bazooka and a 30-caliber machine gun.

So that visitors may compare what was used back then to what is used by today's Army, about eight soldiers from Detachment 1, Headquarters Company of the 1/120 N.C. Army National Guard will be on hand. They will have with them several Hummers (modern-day Jeeps), a large 6 X 6 truck, M16 rifles, a 50-caliber machine gun, LAW anti-tank rockets and a TOW missile system.

Want To Go?
The program kicks off about 1:30 Nov. 6 and continues on Sunday afternoon, Nov. 7. Admission to the military display is free.

Also, Kristin Szylvian, UNC-Wilmington professor and author of Fort Fisher and Camp Davis During World War II, will speak on the impact of the war effort in southeastern North Carolina. Brigadier General Jim Carper, commander of the 30th Brigade, N.C. Army National Guard, will also thank veterans for their efforts 50 years ago.

During World War II, Fort Fisher was used for coastal artillery, anti-aircraft and anti-armor training. Approximately 200 buildings were located there, and approximately 6,000 troops trained there.

The growth and activity of Fort Fisher, Camp Davis, Camp Lejeune,

Fort Bragg, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and the N.C. Shipyards made a major contribution to the war effort. "In many ways World War II brought southeastern North Carolina out of the Great Depression, and propelled us into the growth and prosperity we are now experiencing," said Leland Smith, spokesman for the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources Division of Archives and History.

The event is a fitting way to get ready for Veterans Day, Smith said. The program will kick off at about 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 6, with a short parade of the vehicles up the old WWII runway behind the Civil War Museum. It will also run on Sunday afternoon, Nov. 7. Admission to the military display is free.

The program is part of Fort Fisher State Historic Site's commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World War II. Fort Fisher is an agency of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources.

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