

University mourns passing of Board of Trustees member Jay Robinson

BY HEIDI BING
NEWS EDITOR

Educational representatives and personal friends from across the state convened for a memorial service in Kenan Auditorium on April 30 for Wilmington resident and UNCW Board of Trustees (BOT) member Jay Robinson who died April 24 after a battle with lung cancer. Robinson had an expansive educational career and was instrumental in the development of North Carolina's school accountability program, the ABC's of Public Education, while he served as chairman of the State Board of Education.

"Jay Robinson served as a giant of American education. I've never known an education leader in North Carolina who did more to change and improve our schools than he did," said Governor Jim Hunt in an article in the Raleigh News and Observer. Hunt was one of the many guests at Robinson's memorial service who spoke on his numerous accomplishments. "He insisted that we raise standards for student performance dramatically, but understood that we all have a responsibility for accomplishing this...his legacy will be public schools that help all of our children to succeed."

Robinson began his professional career as a public school math teacher and coach. He became principal and then superintendent of Cabarrus County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Schools during the public schools bussing controversy. In 1971,

the supreme court case of *Swann vs. Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Board of Education* upheld the constitutional mandates of *Brown Vs. Board of Education*, which said that desegregation of public schools did not require all schools in a district to reflect the district's racial composition but that the existence of all-white or all-black schools must be shown not to result from segregation policies. The court mandated that bussing systems be used as a means of correcting racial imbalances. Despite the tumultuous events during this time, Robinson gained a great deal of respect from his district.

"Even though Jay began superintendent during the bussing decision which was so chaotic, after two years he was named Charlotte-Mecklenburg's 'Citizen of the Year,'" said special assistant to the chancellor Mark Lanier who worked closely with Robinson for many years.

Robinson went on to become vice president for public affairs then vice president for special projects for the University of North Carolina General Administration. In recog-

inition of his success convincing legislators and educators to implement the ABC program, Robinson was named one of *Teacher Magazine's* 10 most influential people in American education during the past century.

"Although Jay would disagree with this statement, it is true that no other individual had a greater positive impact on education in North Carolina in the 20th century than Jay Robinson," said Chancellor James R. Leutze. "Every North Carolinian, whether he or she recognizes it or not, is better off because of Jay's life and contributions to our system of education."

After retiring from the legislature, Robinson joined the UNCW BOT, partly due to Lanier's encouragement.

"I consider Jay a mentor because of my work with him in the legislature and when he said he was retiring to Wilmington I immediately asked him if he would serve on the board," Lanier said.

Because of his legislative experience, Robinson was asked to serve on the external affairs committee that deals with fund-

ing, media, and governmental relations at the university. During his time here, Robinson was an avid supporter of funding for the new \$17.5 million building that will house the Watson School of Education and educational resource center. In 1995, the school recognized him with the Razor Walker Award for Educational Administration.

"Jay realized that [the university] was doing things that the other schools weren't by collaborating with the public school systems," Lanier said, stating that university schools of education have often been criticized for being detached from the public schools they are meant to serve. "Our university requires all faculty to spend time working in the public schools and we guarantee a good education to our graduates. Jay knew our school was producing many teachers at the best quality."

Along with his numerous professional achievements, many individuals at the memorial service celebrated their personal relationship with Robinson.

"He combined of a little bit of country humor and homespun personality into a very intellectual and logical point of view that was very convincing," said Lanier, who noted that when he walked around with Robinson during legislative sessions, "Jay couldn't make it past any office without some stopping him to talk."

"I personally will miss his wise counsel, his mountain wit, and his pointed insights," Leutze said.



Courtesy UNCW
Jay Robinson

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