

Published each Thursday since January 18, 1973

The Carolina Indian Voice

ke, NC

Robeson County

"Building communicative bridges in a tri-racial setting"

NUMBER 51

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1991

25 CENTS PER COPY

Dr. Cummings travels long road to dream of becoming doctor

By *Phyllis Locklear*

As a youth plowing farm rows in Robeson County Samuel Mack Cummings dreamt of one day being able to lay down mule reins for a stethoscope. He'd been told by his beloved paternal grandmother that he was a special child. And his father told him at an early age that he would be a physician. Yet, the distance from a tobacco field in rural Pembroke seemed a world's distance to medical school.

Dr. Cummings took the long way around to realizing his dream of becoming a physician.

He was born and raised the oldest child of six born to the Reverend Coolidge M. Cummings and Vanice Lowry Cummings, natives of Robeson County. When Dr. Cummings was still a toddler his parents moved to Louisville, Kentucky where his father entered several years later the family moved back to Robeson County for a brief stay before returning to Kentucky where Rev. Cummings took a pastorate.



Dr. Samuel M. Cummings

Still dreaming of becoming a physician, Dr. Cummings graduated from a Ky. high school in 1966. Afterwards, on a three-sport athletic scholarship, he enrolled at Lambuth College in Jackson, Tenn. where he studied pre-medicine before dropping out after a three semester study.

"I quit because I wasn't sure whether I really wanted to be a physician," he explains.

The Lumbee Indian says he enlisted in the military because he thought serving would give him time to decide what he really wanted to do. "And I thought it would lend me an opportunity to see a little bit of the world." As an Air Force survival instructor he did just that when he traveled to the Philippines, Guam and three times to Vietnam during the six and one half years he served.

"The school bug bit me, and I got out," he says of his decision to leave military service. Dr. Cummings enrolled in Eastern Washington State University where he completed his undergraduate studies with a double major in physics and education.

He also presents continuing medical education for nursing staff, as well as training with the immediate team which supports the wounded ground forces in desert storm. He provides lectures to nursing staff and emergency medical technician students on various obstetrical topics and issues.

Dr. Cummings says he likes his duty station because it offers diversity in patient population and lends professional and academic stimulation.

The forty-some-year-old Air Force major has delivered twelve sets of twins since being assigned to the Royal Air Force Base and sang "Happy Birthday" to each as he has done to the other more than 1,200 newborns he has delivered.

"It's a spontaneous act," he smiles of his singing to the newborns.

An eagle feather of sorts was given Dr. Cummings when he was made a medical consultant to the U.S. Embassy in London. He counts the prestigious assignment among his most-proud of while serving in the military.

The soft-spoken, modest physician plays down the fact he is the first Native American to serve as medical consultant to the U.S. Embassy there.

And when the doctor, father of five grown daughters, gets homesick for his native Robeson County he picks up the telephone and calls home to his parents' home usually

two Sundays a month. He says this allows him an opportunity to find out what "Mama" has cooked for dinner; also a chance to talk with his siblings who usually gather at the Cummings homeplace for a traditional Sunday afternoon visit.

Staying in close touch with family is high on Dr. Cummings' priority list. His family reciprocates. Last July a maternal uncle made a surprise visit to England to see Dr. Cummings. In a pinning ceremony Burlin Lowry gave his beloved nephew the personal "Major leaves" he'd earned decades earlier while serving as an Air Force pilot. It seemed only fitting that this uncle would appear because he had earlier given Dr. Cummings his Captain bars...his first toy medical kit and his first golf club.

Come two more years Samuel M. Cummings must make a decision whether or not he will remain in military service. He does not ponder the thought now.

He admits to having a curious mind. "I've always wanted to see what's beyond the hill. Working for the military is like working for a major corporation. It has little shops all over the world."

The degree, coupled with a strong family bond, influenced him to return to his native county where he took a teaching position at Fairgrove High School. He taught physics and mathematics for two years at the school. And though happy teaching, his dreams never wavered from becoming a physician.

"I'd seen old friends who had gone to medical and law schools...they were on a straight track. There had been no school counselors to tell me I could enter medical school at an older age," he comments.

With mind made up, Dr. Cummings says that during his second year of teaching at the public school, he applied to dental school at UNC/Chapel Hill and was accepted. He turned the offer down because what he really wanted to study was medicine.

He lay down the eraser at Fairgrove School and entered Pembroke State University as a full-time pre-med student in order to complete intense chemistry courses. During this period he worked nights as an orderly at Scotland County Memorial Hospital in order to pay his tuition and living expenses.

His dream of studying medicine began to develop when he enrolled at UNC/Chapel Hill School of Medicine. He had attended the school's summer MED program and says he was impressed with his professors' philosophy that an admissions process should be used in determining whether one should become a physician. "They expected everyone who entered medical school to graduate," he says.

He lived on campus and his study was financed by scholarships and grants from a Native American association... "And money and food from relatives," he interjects.

His dream of earning his medical degree came true when he graduated from UNC in 1985. His medical specialty - Obstetrics and Gynecology. He was completing his medical residency at New Hanover Hospital in Wilmington, NC when "Uncle Sam" contacted him to come serve again in the military.

"I'd never been to Europe and told them I'd go back into the Air Force if I could be assigned to a station there," he laughs. His request was granted. He serves in the medical corps at the Royal Air Force Base in Lakenheath, England.

Dr. Cummings is assistant chairman of the department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. His clinic provides outpatient care for 150-200 ob/gyn patients per month. As assistant chairman he is a member of the department's medical records utilization review committee and supervises a certified midwife.

For now he says he is content in singing "Happy Birthday" to newborn babies he delivers; attending theatre performances with his wife, Nancy; and keeping in touch with relatives in Robeson County who still live across the road from the fields he plowed as a young boy who dreamed of becoming a physician.



The Music Ministries of Prospect United Methodist Church, Route 3, Maxton, will present the Musical THE SONG on Sunday morning, December 22 at 10:40 a.m. The public is invited to come and celebrate with the Chancel Choir, Youth Choir, and Childrens Choir as they lead in the worship of Jesus Christ and the praise

of His birth. There will be solos, special lighting and other effects to enhance the musical production. The musical will be directed by Mr. Harold D. Jacobs and narrated by Ms. Doris Hunt and Mr. David Oxendine. The pastor, Rev. Bill James Locklear, and the congregation, cordially invites the public to attend.

Participants in Pembroke Christmas Parade



Union Chapel School's 1991-92 King and Queen were participants in Pembroke's annual Christmas parade. They were recently selected at a fund-raising event at Union Chapel. Shown left to right are Kelly Hunt,

grandson of Remer and Peggy Oxendine; and Charlene Locklear, daughter of Kenneth and Phyllis Locklear. The King and Queen are 4th grade students in Ms. Linda Hunt's class.



Participants in Pembroke's annual Christmas parade competition at a recent fund-raising event at Union were all the representatives for king and queen Chapel School.

Cynthia Locklear wins SGH Golden Rule Award

Cynthia Locklear, a volunteer with Hospice of Robeson, has won the Golden Rule award for the month of October. This award is presently monthly to that person who best demonstrates pride in the SGH Healthcare Corporation and a caring attitude to guests and employees.

Mrs. Locklear has worked as a Hospice volunteer since May 1989, and is the first volunteer to win this award. She is a native of Robeson County and a graduate of Magnolia High School. She, husband Timothy Paul, and 2 children, Timia and Tim, II, live in the Union Chapel area.

On receiving the award, Mrs. Locklear said she learned the "do unto others" principle from her mother as a child. "I love people," she added. "Meeting people's needs and doing something positive are the most important things in my life."

As a Golden Rule winner, Mrs. Locklear received a plaque, a personal parking space for the month, \$50 in cash, and a chance in the drawing for a 4-day vacation next fall.



Community Briefs

Friendship Missionary Baptist Church will present a Christmas Cantata, "Emmanuel" on Sunday, December 22, 1991 at 10:30 a.m. The pastor, Collidge M. Cummings, invites the public to attend. The church is located on Pembroke-Prospect Road, Pembroke, NC.

Ten Mile Center Baptist Church on Highway 301, 7 miles North of Lumberton, will have a live Nativity Scene on December 20, 21, and 22 from 5 until 6p.m. The pastor is Rev. Earney Hammonds.

Say You Read It In
The Carolina Indian Voice