

Eye Witness to History

by Dexter Brooks,
Senior Resident Superior Court Judge

Serving as Superior Court Judge since 1989, I have the unique distinction of being the first Native American to serve in that capacity in the State of North Carolina, and possibly in the nation. Along with the distinction of serving, I have been honored on many historic occasions in the county. In this column I will reprint for you the speeches I gave on these historic occasions. I have been an eye witness to history and am honored to have had the opportunity to participate in the recording of this history.

Oath of Office on July 1, 1992 to the Newly-Elected Members of the Board of Education for the Public Schools of Robeson County.

It is indeed my pleasure to administer the oath of office to the seven newly elected members of the Board of Education for the Public Schools of Robeson County. On this historic occasion it is only right and proper that we reflect on how we came to be here today.

In the not too distant past, our county was divided into six independent school systems that administered separate and unequal schools for three racial groups. My father, John Brooks, taught for many years in the local Indian schools working within the system to improve the opportunities available to his students in spite of the evil of discrimination. His brother, and closest friend, Peter, made his living in the building trade, yet sought to change the system so as to improve the educational opportunities available to his people. My Uncle Pete loved to recount how he built the first school bus for Indian children when the county refused to provide such services to Indians.

May recognized the unfairness and wastefulness of our former system for educating and under-educating our young and worked tirelessly to improve it. Then Rep. Joy J. Johnson stood alone in our local legislative delegation when he introduced a bill to end the double-voting method of electing the former county school board. The resulting *Janie Maynor Locklear* federal litigation, however, finally limited the right to vote to only those who lived within the school district. The last time that I saw my uncle Pete he was in intensive care at the local hospital, yet his concern was not about his health but with the status of the double-voting litigation. This successful litigation resulted in a majority-Indian board of education which implemented an equitable district election plan so that all races would be fairly represented and equal opportunity became not just a slogan but an accomplished fact as blacks, whites and Native Americans were

appointed to important administrative positions.

In spite of the progress in the county system, much remained to be

done in the city systems. The *Margaret Cannady* federal litigation successfully challenged the illegal annexations to the Lumberton school system under the Voting Rights Act. The *Joy J. Johnson* federal litigation sought to force the city school systems to follow the lead of the county system by electing their boards on a district basis so that these boards would likewise become tri-racial. The case became moot, however, because our citizens voted in 1988 to merge all of the county's school systems. Whether one was in favor of the merger or opposed, most would agree that it was probably the most significant single political event in recent county history as a tri-racial group, including Eric Prevatte of the Citizens After Responsible Education (CARE) organization, forever ended the local practice of multiple school systems.

When you seven members take your seats, for the first time in history Robeson county will have an all-elected board of education, serving the entire county, which accurately reflects its racial makeup. Each of you, however, represents blacks, whites and Indians; as well as those who supported and opposed the merger of our former five school systems.

In our diversity you represent what America will become early in the next century. Blacks, whites, and Native Americans must learn to understand and respect the culture of each other if we are to be successful in attacking common problems. If you fail, then how can our nation succeed?

The time for litigation is past. The time for discrimination is past. Your goal should be nothing less than insuring that every child—regardless of race, wealth, or neighborhood—has the same opportunity to develop to their full potential. In accomplishing this goal, those who labor under your supervision should be held to the same exacting standards without regard to race or political favor. In your hands you hold, in solemn trust, the very fragile hopes and dreams of many generations.

On behalf of my Dad and my Uncle Pete, and of course, my eighty-seven year old Mom, who is shamelessly proud of her second-youngest son, I thank you for allowing me to participate in this great event. You honor me by asking that I perform this ceremony. I shall be forever grateful.

Letters to the Editor

Clear Message Sent by Members of District 2 to Board of Education

To the Editor
The members of District 2 Board of Education sent a Clear Message—"Robesonians Care More About Improving Education Than Playing Politics." Therefore, I submit this letter in response to the shenanigans that took place in replacing the member of the board of education on January 21, 1997.

I have never been more appalled, disappointed, and embarrassed with the termed "so-called" leaders' political games and the wheeling and dealing with the educational opportunities of our children here in Robeson County.

It has taken me a little time since January 21 to attempt to digest and to move forward believing that the PSRC Board of Education members expected us to think we were in the "real world" of decision-making.

Can you agree with me that the board of education members are living and operating in a setting of education dysfunction?

I took the board of education membership month and eleven days to announce its decisions of who would be the replacement on the board of education. It was not a matter of partisan bickering that took so long. It was some board members and their friends who chose to practice self-aggrandizement making grandiloquent speeches instead of working to help our schools and our children.



Shellac, a varnish, comes from the lac scale insect, which feeds on plants by sucking out juices.

Say you read it in Carolina Indian Voice.

The catastrophic problem and the real truth is that the decision had already been made prior to January 1997. There really was no need for the people to think we could have been heard nor a need to engage ourselves in the exercise of futility. The controlling forces were at work and had already spoken. This type of public representation must stop and we will see that it does.

How do the board members expect our children and the education staffs to learn to be "functional" and to "reach out" giving every person a chance when they engage in political-stronghold maneuvers as was the case?

Many of the board members need to wake-up, stop the "controlling, dominating attitudes," and get on with the people's business and the education of our children.

With the behavior of the school board members and other elected officials, it is no wonder that several new "watchdog" organizations have emerged recently in this county. People are fed up with the "good-old-boy" system and self-perpetuation of our officials.

Just this one incident of replacing a member of the board raises some serious questions about the deception and corrupt practices of many of our elected officials. A lesson should have been learned when David Green resigned and his replacement with

John Campbell was made at the same time (board meeting) that Green's resignation was accepted (made public). Is it possible the board members made a mistake then by not appointing Brenda Fagan who was Green's opposition? Instead, the board members appointed John Campbell.

John Campbell, the Human Relations Director, would have us to believe he has all the answers to contract negotiations, filling vacancies, and now he wants an increase in his salary as a board member. It was just a few months ago that the County Commissioners gave him an astronomical salary increase as HR Director, now he wants another 67 percent salary increase. Does he know who pays all his salaries?

We are sure there are many other Robesonians who would care more about improving education than playing politics and raising their own salary as John Campbell has done. Our children and the people deserve the very best in representation from our board of education members.

The decision of school board replacement has been made, and we must move forward. However, we hope the board will develop policies governing such delicate issues and other far-reaching issues of the people.

Citizens for Better Education,
Henry Douglas
Chairperson

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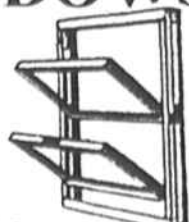
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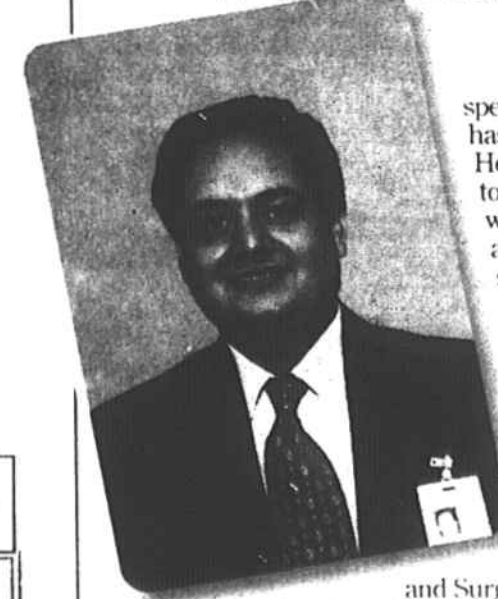


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This Community Just Keeps Getting Healthier.



Pinakin P. Vias, M.D., specializing in internal medicine, has joined the staff of SRMC. He will provide primary care to adults and will treat patients with chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.

A native of Bombay, India, Dr. Vias practiced general surgery in India for over two years. He completed his residency training in internal medicine at Harlem Hospital Center affiliated with Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons and Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City.

Pinakin P. Vias, M.D.

We can all feel good about each new addition to the medical staff at Southeastern Regional Medical Center. Every physician brings years of education, specialized training and personal expertise to our highly diversified health care team—and to our community.

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to our newest doctor. With your arrival, there is a significant improvement in the general health of this community.

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