

Our School Board

Mrs. Plemmons: A teacher who gives herself plenty of homework

By ROBIN ADAMS
Staff Writer

This article is the second in a series profiling school board members.

Her fellow members on the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education refer to Margaret Plemmons as a lady who does her homework.

Thus, it's no surprise that, when she comes to an interview, she comes armed with a satchel full of papers and a copy of the school budget, looking just like a librarian.

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-- Margaret Plemmons

But after watching her in motion at the school board meetings, where she serves as vice chairman of the board, it is obvious that Plemmons is more than a librarian.

She's both assertive and aggressive, but not to the point that she could be classified as pushy.

"If a woman is assertive, then she is often referred to as pushy, but if a man has the same amount of assertiveness, then he is aggressive," Plemmons says.

And when she asks questions -- which she does often -- or makes a point, Margaret Plemmons knows what she is talking about.

"And that's hard to do. Some weeks we don't get our briefing material until Friday before the Monday meeting. And I have to read, digest and absorb all of that," she says. "But I want to have the information. I want to know what I am talking about."

A career in teaching at Wake Forest University, Plemmons says, makes her the kind of board member she is. "I encourage my students to ask questions. Lots of times when I'm at the board meetings, I think I ask questions that a lot of people want to know the answer to," she says.

Everybody's questions have become a bit more frequent and pointed at school board sessions, as Plemmons and the rest of the board attempt to agree on a four-year high school reorganizational plan.

"The plan we decide on must be equally fair or equally unfair to everybody," Plemmons says. "I want to have a plan where the students have all the advantages."

That plan, according to the way Plemmons has been voting lately, would include middle schools, eight high school geographic districts, eight high schools and maybe a traditional school, and would be put into effect by 1985.

Plemmons says that coming up with a plan has not been easy: "When we write regulations, we have to be able to defend them in a court of law. And the changes we are proposing will be a big improvement in all the schools. So we have to be careful."

There's also considerable give-and-take involved. "We're having to make some compromises," she says.

She'll go along with some compromises, Plemmons says, as long as they don't conflict with her beliefs. When they do, she won't. Take the issue of neighborhood schools, for instance:

"We cannot have neighborhood schools," Plemmons says. "They would either be 100 percent black or white. And if they are predominantly black, the white parents would pull their children out of the school. It would be very dangerous to have neighborhood schools."

Plemmons says she is in favor of trying to keep the



Margaret Plemmons, member of the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education (photo by James Parker).

schools in the inner city open, but notes that many of the black schools that have been slated for closing are just too small to be used in the present plans. "We are closing just as many schools located in predominantly white neighborhoods as in predominantly black neighborhoods," she says.

Plemmons is also not in favor of having black history taught as a separate class. She feels it should be incorporated into the regular history classes.

Why does Plemmons vote the way she does? "I base my decisions on the facts and information the way I see it," she says. "I try to look at things that are best for the students. And that may not be the easiest for the administration. And I try to respect other people's points of view."

As for changes she'd like to see in the school system, Plemmons says the board needs to in-

vestigate the current curriculum.

"We need to cut down on the number of choices. We can't afford some of those classes," Plemmons says. For example, she says, an aviation technology class and computer course are too expensive for the school system. "We are spending a lot of money for a few students," Plemmons contends.

Being a parent of two children -- one gifted and talented and the other a child with special needs -- an educator and a board member places Plemmons on both sides of the issues.

How is being on the board different from just being a parent? "It's fun to have a vote," she says. "When you are on the board, people call you with individual problems. But the board is responsible for setting policy and the superintendent and the ad-

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Easton homes to get new faces

By RUTHELL HOWARD
Staff Writer

Not since the urban renewal of the section known as the East Winston Redevelopment Area during the 60s has there been talk of so much federal money being poured into the black community for housing.

The city's Community Development office, through a North Carolina Housing Finance Agency Home Improvement Loan Program and other housing renewal assistance programs, plans to help improve more than 2,500 homes, many of them occupied by black families, with \$200,000 in rehabilitation loans and grants and \$100,000 to locate apartments on 12th Street.

This spells good news for many residents, especially those who live in Easton, which has been recently designated a community development area. Easton residents are now eligible for assistance under housing improvement programs that provide free exterior paint, low-interest loans at rates as high as 11 percent and as low as one percent or grants up to \$8,500 to renovate their homes.

Through Operation Paint Brush, a \$10,000 program which will be offered through July 1, low and moderate-income homeowners outside CD areas will be repaid for paint they have purchased to improve

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Wanda Johnson says that a helpful friend and a considerate uncle have combined to make her stay in Winston-Salem a pleasant one (photo by James Parker).

The Newcomers

She enjoys Winston's hospitality

By EDWARD HILL JR.
Staff Writer

Wanda Johnson bears witness that having a helpful friend and a considerate relative can make the transition from one place to another much smoother.

"When I first got here in Winston-Salem, a certain friend took me under his wing and showed me how to go about getting jobs and just generally adjusting to another city," says Wanda, a native of Laurel Hill. "And then my uncle offered to let me stay with him until I could get on my feet. Those things made my transition a lot easier."

After graduation from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Wanda worked briefly with the Upward Bound Program at UNC-G as a tutor and a counselor.

Feeling that she needed to get a job in her chosen field of child development/family relations, Wanda came to Winston-Salem, where she faced more frustration. She first worked for a department store, then a daily newspaper.

"Jobs were hard to get, especially in my field," says Wanda. "I was not getting what I wanted, but I had to work somewhere."

Wanda's frustration ended this past April when she was hired as a residential counselor with Youth

Opportunities Home Inc., an emergency placement service for youth, ages 10-17. She says the job offers a challenge.

"I've found that you apply some of the theory you got in the classroom, but mostly it has a lot to do with therapy and practical application," says Wanda.

Because of a work schedule that includes seven days on 24-hour duty and seven days off, Wanda says she has to make adjustments in her social life.

As for her perceptions of Winston-Salem, Wanda says, laughing, "First of all, the sizes of Winston and home are a lot different. But I must say that I have personally experienced a warmth here that is not present at home."

"Another thing I like about Winston is the opportunity for cultural enrichment. There is also the added attraction of the beautiful parks and its closeness to the mountains."

Wanda says she is not a "club person" and just enjoys simple things, like spending time with a few friends, going to the beach, going to church and eating out.

As for her future, Wanda says she'd like to continue working in her field to get as much experience as possible. Later, she says, she'd like to enroll in graduate school.



Ebony Flame, a dance group at Reynolds Recreation Center, is just one of the many programs offered to residents of the Reynolds Park Road neighborhood. The members of the group are, from the left, Michelle Evans, Sonya Correll, Michelle Todd and Carla Tyson (photo by James Parker).

Reynolds Park Road

Residents say its convenience attracted them

By EDWARD HILL JR.
Staff Writer

This article is the tenth in a series spotlighting neighborhoods in the black community

Residents of the Reynolds Park Road neighborhood say convenience is one of their area's most precious commodities.

"The thing that attracted me to this area is that it is conveniently located," says John Thatch, who has lived in the 1200 block of Reynolds Forest Drive for the past four years. "We have a nearby shopping center (Parkview) for our needs. There is a recreation center within walking distance for the children and the golf course (Reynolds Park) is close, also."

"One of the reasons I moved over here is because everything is in a good location," says Otis Hawkins, who moved to the 1100 block of Butler Street five years ago. "There are nice recreational and educational facilities. There is a shopping center closeby and the highways are accessible. And the one thing I especially like is the golf course."

"The thing I like about it, is that it is convenient to downtown where I work," says Paris Favors, who lives in the 2700 block of Reynolds Forest Court.

Located in the southeastern section of the city, the Reynolds Park Road community includes Salem Lake Road, Five Points, Butler Street, Reynolds Forest Drive and, of course, Reynolds Park Road.

The area is tree-lined with a variety of split-level and ranch-style homes that range in value from \$50,000 to \$70,000.

The majority of the residents are middle- and upper-middle-class and work professional, skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

Reynolds Park Road was once predominantly white, but has become more mixed in recent years.

"More blacks have moved in the area in recent years," says Roger Tucker, a white resident who has lived in the 1500 block of Salem Lake Road for 28 years. "The neighborhood is now half-white, half-black, but there are no racial problems."

"We've had a change out here," says Bess Weir, a white resident who has lived in the 1700 block of Butler Street for 16 years. "When we moved out

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