



FLAIR

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

AWARDS
First Hall of Fame honor goes to Vrugink
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EXTRA CREDIT

Celebrate Children awards honor those who reach beyond to connect schools and community

H By Roland Wilkerson
 The Grand Rapids Press
 istory books can take children only so far. Hazel Lewis helps them finish the

journey. Every year the community volunteer loads 30 low-income youth on a bus for a long weekend, heading to places like Memphis and Atlanta to explore the roots of African-American history sometimes glossed over in classrooms.

"There aren't enough teachers in the school system to take care of what we need to be doing," she explains simply. Initiative and commitment like that led the Grand Rapids Public Education Fund to name Lewis one winner in its second annual Celebrate Children awards. The tribute recognizes outstanding contributions to education, spotlighting the relationship between school and community.

The recipients were honored at a breakfast program today. "Hazel has just done an extraordinary job with this," said Beth Dilley, executive director of the Public Education Fund, a non-profit independent group that offers funds and other support to the Grand Rapids Public Schools. "With her volunteer work with kids, she's a one-person show — which is pretty amazing to me."

Also honored were:
 ■ Elmer Vrugink, former Grand Rapids Public Schools administrator, who's now a dean at Davenport College;
 ■ Eugenia Marve, an art teacher at Riverside Middle School;
 ■ Latesha Lipscomb, a junior at Central High School;
 ■ Jim Barton, a lawyer and volunteer parent at City High-Middle; and
 ■ Butterworth Hospital, business partner of Coit Elementary.
 "They've all done an extraordinary job of bringing schools and community together," said Dilley. "They haven't been limited by the ways we've always done things in the past and are willing to explore new roles and new relationships."

As Lewis looks at things, it's her duty to break a few molds.

"When I was growing up, I didn't know anything about black history, only what I was told about through family, my grandmother and this kind of thing," Lewis said. "I thought our youth are losing something. They're not geared into the privileges they're receiving today. They don't know how hard some people worked to get them where they are today."

So she organizes the annual trips for local high schoolers, so they can learn about the history of slavery and the hard-fought battles for civil rights. Award givers haven't forgotten their

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Hazel Lewis, community volunteer.



Latesha Lipscomb, a junior at Central High School.



Elmer Vrugink, former GR Public Schools administrator, dean at Davenport College.

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BETH DILLEY
 Director, Public Education Fund



Jim Barton, lawyer and volunteer parent at City High-Middle.



Eugenia Marve, art teacher at Riverside Middle School.

local history. They recognize the lifetime that Vrugink has spent as an advocate of public education, and selected him to receive the first Hall of Fame award.

"He's been an extraordinary candidate for children," Dilley said. "We really saw this as a way to give recognition to a cause he's championed for a number of years."

Seeing a bigger picture

Vrugink, who served as acting superintendent in Grand Rapids for 10 months in 1983, also worked to establish Park School for Teen Parents, City High, and Blandford Nature Center and Zoo schools. He has long pushed for more equitable state funding and using the schools to deliver social services to disadvantaged youngsters.

"When I gave that talk 25 years ago it was a radical idea," recalled Vrugink, 66, who sees more merit than ever as schools shoulder more responsibility in the care of students. "Someday we're going to have to think of schools as part of the broader community. It may be someday that we need to use buildings not only as schools, but for health and social services."

Marve, 46, was singled out for her belief that students in her art classes at Riverside learn about more than paints and perspective.

"It's not about drawing the best picture, but feeling positive about what they're trying to accomplish," she said. "I think the most creative and wonderful things people have is themselves."

Marve also directed a tutoring and mentorship program between Riverside and area colleges. Lipscomb, 16, helped define student rights and responsibilities

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LATESHA LIPSCOMB

at the Grand Rapids Children's Summit the district sponsored this fall. She volunteered on a number of school-related projects and tutors at Fountain Elementary. So why does she do it? "I don't know," she quipped. "Sometimes I wonder myself." Seriously, she added, "I really get a joy out of all of it and the more I give, the more I get back." After spending last summer at Yale University's Junior State Summer School, she's considering a career in politics.

Acting on a need

Barton, a lawyer with Law, Weathers & Richardson, found himself helping out at City High/Middle last year when he discovered the computer lab desperately needed updating.

Although his seventh-grade daughter, Sarah, had access to a good computer at home, not every other City student had that luxury. "It was a sad situation which needed to be addressed, and we needed to get things up and running to at least get the basics addressed, and at a very low cost to the schools system," Barton said.

He learned that Varnum, Riddering, Schmidt & Howlett was getting rid of its old computers and arranged the donation of the firm's 55 personal computers to City.

He then helped set up the new lab and linked all the machines through a local area network.

And Butterworth was cited for its fruitful five-year relationship with Coit Elementary, where the hospital staff have volunteered as mentors and tutors for hundreds of students. The medical center also has donated technical assistance and material resources.

"They've really developed an entire partnership and collaboration to get better health care for kids," Dilley said.