

EDUCATION IN SPRINGFIELD..A SUCCESS STORY IN THE MAKING

January 28, 2002

What makes Springfield unique among all other Ohio districts? Perhaps a revelation to many, the distinction lies in the relatively overlooked field of educational leadership resident in our own community.

In Springfield, across the state, and even nationally, our schools are suffering. Changes must be made throughout, and now is the time for planting new seeds. Some may be surprised to learn that our community has these seeds...and they are sprouting and spreading their roots.

In 1992, Ohio became a participant in the Milken Foundation National Educator Awards Program. This national program, which includes 44 states, honors outstanding educators with both public recognition and financial reward. The philosophy of this awards program is that acknowledging exceptional educators attracts more talented people to the challenge and adventure of teaching.

Springfield is the only city in the state of Ohio to have two National Educator Award winners! Pam Young won her award in 1992 as principal of Snowhill Elementary School. She now works in Columbus, Ohio at the state level as associate superintendent of the Ohio Department of Education's Center for School Reform and Options. While remaining an active Springfield resident, Ms. Young stays involved in the betterment of local education. In 2001, Melody Boyd was honored with the National Educator Award for her innovative work as a seventh-grade teacher at Roosevelt Middle School. Yet another award-winner this past year is Wittenberg professor Robert Welker, named Ohio Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

Each of these award-winning educators is on the front lines of the struggle for reform every day. One striving to improve the quality of our teachers, one seeking answers at the state level and one in the heart of practical experience. They are our inspiration, our advisors, and our mentors. Their steadfast dedication to the task and their desire to achieve excellence, must be the same goals that the community sets for itself in all of its pursuits.

Welker, Young and Boyd have a strong commitment to remembering why they chose careers in education. Their passion is for the kids and for finding new ways to reach each one. It is easy as a community to get weighed down in poor district ratings and proficiency scores, and to forget where the focus must be if change is to happen. Experience shows us that it doesn't just happen. It will take the combined and faithful involvement of every member of the community. When we look past the statistics to the faces of those who are striving for a solution, we see a far different perspective. With local award-winning educators leading by example, it is obvious that Springfield has the raw material, the talent, and the committed educational leadership to make the necessary changes. The responsibility now lies with each citizen, as well as the school system itself, to make use of this exceptional talent base.