

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

April 10, 2013

Guy Fenter, “A Difference Maker” (Charleston Express)

Guy Fenter has spent a lifetime of “Making a Difference,” in the lives of countless individuals through leadership, education and public service. In appreciation, he was presented the Charleston Chamber of Commerce “Lifetime Achievement Award,” during the annual Chamber Banquet that was held last Saturday in the Charleston Elementary and Middle School cafeteria.

One of the largest crowds in recent history to attend the Chamber Banquet, included Mr. Fenter’s family as well as a large number of the staff from the Western Arkansas Educational Service Cooperative, where Mr. Fenter serves as the Director.

Mr. Fenter has been a “Starfish thrower” for his entire life, the crowd was told in reference to the Starfish Story. The Starfish story, along with a Starfish pin, is something that Mr. Fenter has handed out, many times throughout the years.

Since he first came to Charleston in 1960 there hasn’t been many things that have gone on around Charleston or any significant educational issue in the entire State of Arkansas that Mr. Fenter has not been involved in, the large crowd was told.

Mr. Fenter, who has been named Charleston’s “Citizen of the Year” twice and had a city street, Guy Fenter Drive, named in his honor in 2004, was born and raised near Delight, Arkansas. After graduating from Delight High School, he hitchhiked to Conway to attend Arkansas State Teacher’s College, now the University of Central Arkansas, becoming the first from his family to attend college. He graduated from college in 1954 and has been working to improve the quality of education in Arkansas ever since.

He taught English and coached football and girls basketball at Paris for 6 years before he came to Charleston in 1960 as High School Principal. He served as Principal and Superintendent of the Charleston Schools for 24 years before being named the director of the Western Arkansas Educational Service Coop in 1983, a title he still holds. The Coop serves Franklin, Sebastian, Crawford, Johnson, Logan and Scott counties. Mr. Fenter is the only director the Coop has ever had.

Mr. Fenter epitomizes what the Educational Coops was, is and will be, Dr. Tom Kimbrell, Commissioner of the Arkansas Department of Education, said. Mr. Fenter is what the Coops were put in to do and that is to “serve the students,” Dr. Kimbrell said. “He’s all about the kids.”

Mr. Fenter served 13 years on the Arkansas Activities Association, including two terms as president and has served as Chairman of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. He was appointed to the Game and Fish Commission in 1971 by then Governor Dale Bumpers.

He has also worked to implement many different educational programs, such as the Western Arkansas Technical Center, (WATC) at UA Fort Smith. WATC was formed in 1998 through a collaborative effort by UA Fort Smith, the Western Arkansas Education Service Cooperative, and the Arkansas Department of Workforce Education and provides area high school juniors and seniors with the unique opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. Allowing the students to gain concurrent credit is something that Mr. Fenter said he believes strongly in.

The WATC program at UAFS has been so successful that a similar Workforce Technology Center at Mid South Community College in West Memphis has also been implemented.

Mr. Fenter, who was instrumental in the formation of the WATC program, said it was one of the most gratifying programs he had ever been a part of. I'm really proud of the WATC program, he said.

Mr. Fenter was appointed by Governor Mike Beebe, to the Task Force for the 21st Century Economy, which was established by the 86th General Assembly of Arkansas to study the role and scope of economic development in the 21st Century in Arkansas, and to identify the programs and services needed for continued development in Arkansas. Mr. Fenter was the only member of the group from the field of education, but education was the first subject that came up and was at the forefront of the numerous meetings that were held across the state, with a lot of emphasis on workforce education.

He has also spent many hours at the State Capitol, talking to legislators about issues that are important to education.

All these things, as well as countless others, have a common denominator, making a positive difference by giving people, especially young people, better opportunities for a better and more productive life.

He has also had a profound influence on many people who are in a position to help others. "The impact that Mr. Fenter has had on school administrators, especially young administrators, across the state is phenomenal and unbelievable," Dr. Kimbrell said. "Anywhere I go and everywhere I go throughout the state, I run into administrators that Mr. Fenter has had an impact on, Dr. Kimbrell said. "They are everywhere."

Something that puts into perspective the significance and importance that Mr. Fenter has had in the educational field in Arkansas was a comment by Dr. Kimbrell, pertaining to a rumor that Mr. Fenter is thinking about retiring. That rumor had made it to the State Capitol and Dr. Kimbrell's response was that he had absolutely no intention of allowing Mr. Fenter to retire. If he needed to, he said, he would even get Governor Beebe involved and the Governor would be calling.

When the Commissioner of the State Department of Education and the Governor calls to say that you are too important to the state's education system to retire that pretty much says about all that needs to be said.

Anthony: Alzheimer elementary school recommended for closure (Pine Bluff Commercial)

Alzheimer-Martin Elementary School will be recommended for closure at the end of the current school year because of a continuing drop in enrollment, Dollarway School District Superintendent Frank Anthony said Tuesday.

Anthony briefed a large group of school staff, parents, students and supporters during an open forum held in the school cafeteria about the deteriorating financial position of the school district. Anthony will make his recommendation that the school be closed to state education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell.

“We are looking at economies of scale here,” Anthony said. “Money is what drives all of our actions and the loss of enrollment is the driver in this situation. The loss of students should mean a reduction in staff but that has been put off and has led us to where we are today.”

Anthony said that in some cases decisions of the mind must take precedence over decisions of the heart.

“Sometimes the head has to lead the heart and this is one of those times,” Anthony said.

Anthony faced a large screen set up at the front of the cafeteria upon which a PowerPoint presentation was projected.

“Overstaffing in relation to the number of students led to deficit spending over the past three years,” Anthony said as he pointed to information on the screen. “In the 2009-10 school year the district spent \$818,770 more than it took in. In the 2010-11 school year the amount was \$355,840. Last year the district spent \$1.2 million more than it took in.”

Anthony said that if that rate of spending were to continue through the end of the 2013-14 school year the district would be completely insolvent.

“We would be b-r-o-k-e; broke,” Anthony said.

Anthony said that each enrolled child represents \$6,267 in revenue to the school district.

The case for closure

“Alzheimer-Martin had 119 students two years ago and as of April 5 it had 78 students,” Anthony said. “That amounts to \$488,826 coming to the district. Projected expenses for the upcoming school year for this school come to \$1.2 million. The end result is a drain of \$700,000 on school district funds.”

Anthony said that Alzheimer-Martin is one of three priority schools in the Dollarway district.

“Priority schools are classified by the state as among the lowest 5 percent of schools based on proficiency,” Anthony said. “Townsend Park Elementary and James Matthews Elementary both met state standards while Altheimer-Martin did not. Dollarway has three of the 50 lowest performing schools in the state with Dollarway High School and Robert Morehead Middle School also priority schools.”

“My position is to try to be proactive and I have to make a recommendation to Dr. Kimbrell,” Anthony said. “Come June 30 we will have to cease instructional operations at Martin Elementary. We evaluated this situation for the past 11 months. When you start talking about closing schools you are affecting livelihoods. I am not a stranger to this. As superintendent in the Pine Bluff School District I had to oversee the closure of eight schools. It was not pleasant but it had to be done to keep the district solvent.”

Anthony said that the district also has been authorized to implement the reduction-in-force policy for district employees if the superintendent decides it is needed.

“If we do not have enough retirements and resignations to meet the staff numbers we need, then we will have to move to the RIF policy,” Anthony said.

Questions

After he had concluded his presentation Anthony opened the floor to questions from the audience.

“Apparently the decision has been made on the reduction-in-force policy and the closing of this school,” former Dollarway School Board member Efrem Elliott said. “What can be done for the staff here?”

Anthony replied that the reduction-in-force policy would be applied on a district-wide basis and that teachers with long tenures are relatively safe.

“Reduction in force is not driven by campuses,” Anthony said. “I want people to be treated fairly. It is pretty much a senior staff here at Martin and the policy is driven first by tenure and second by number of subject certifications. So the longer a teacher has been here and the more subjects they are able to teach the more likely it is that they will not have to worry about the RIF policy.”

Altheimer resident and substitute teacher Lizzie Rasberry gave an impassioned plea for a last-chance solution.

“It’s going to be so hard for these little kids to have that bus ride to Pine Bluff and back every day,” Rasberry said. “Altheimer-Martin is one of the best schools in the state. I tell you going to Pine Bluff is like going to prison. These kids are living here and they should be able to go to school here. Everybody talk to the people about bringing their kids back here.”

Anthony thanked Rasberry for her comments and agreed that it was a difficult situation.

Elliott asked if any thought has been given as to what should be done with the existing school building.

"Hopefully it could be used as a youth facility," Elliott said.

Anthony said that some preliminary discussions have been held but that nothing has yet been decided.

Some of the questions focused on student safety.

"Did you think about our kids having to cross the bridge over the Arkansas River during bad weather?" one woman asked.

"We did," Anthony said.

"If kids get sick over there are you going to bring them back home?" a man asked.

"I'm not too proud to do that but I believe there is a parental responsibility here, too," Anthony said.

"I appreciate your candidness and I feel your concerns," Anthony said at the conclusion of the forum.

Senate Votes to Cut Planned Parenthood's Funding for HIV/AIDS Education (KARK, Channel 4)

LITTLE ROCK, AR -- The Arkansas Senate has moved to cut off funding to Planned Parenthood for HIV/AIDS education efforts at local schools.

The sponsor says he doesn't want state money going to an organization that makes abortion referrals.

The same bill failed by one vote on Friday, but passed with a one-vote cushion on Tuesday.

Planned Parenthood supporters lined up outside the senate doors and filled the balcony to watch the debate.

The sponsor says he simply doesn't want state money to go to planned parenthood for sex education because of the group's ties to abortion, even if the education money isn't used for abortions.

"They're worried about a few thousand dollars for a group trying to teach young people in this school district in Little Rock about HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it. And it's just wrong," Eric Camp said.

"Those grants have been helpful to those children as we fight HIV/AIDS and the rise of sexually transmitted diseases. It is not about abortions," said Linda Chesterfield.

"It says all funds are strictly accounted for and no public funds are used to pay for abortions with rare exceptions," Jason Rapert said. "It's very interesting they put in their own flier that none of those funds are used for abortions with rare exceptions. Fact of the matter is, they shouldn't be done at all."

Planned Parenthood says it will oppose the bill again when it moves to the Democratically-controlled House Public Health Committee later this week.

White Hall board set to consider Redfield resource officer (White Hall Progress)

The White Hall School District Board of Directors was scheduled to consider the hiring of a school resource officer for Hardin Elementary during its regular monthly meeting Tuesday night.

“Chief [Steve] McFatridge with the Redfield Police Department spoke with me about the possibility of placing a school resource officer at Hardin,” district superintendent Larry Smith said Tuesday. “I will recommend that the school board pass the measure. I am always very supportive of the presence of school resource officers and in the wake of the Newtown, Conn., shootings you just can’t be too careful when it comes to school safety.”

Smith said that the district will draw up an agreement with the RPD.

“It will be a three-year program in which the district covers half of the cost of the officer,” Smith said. “It is the same agreement that we have with the White Hall Police Department. I anticipate that the board will support it.”

Smith said that he would provide the board with a legislative update of the bills that have passed related to education.

“There is one that deals with the use of cell phones and electronic devices by students and another that permanently sets the date for spring break in all Arkansas public school districts as the 38th week of the school year,” Smith said. “There are probably between 40 and 50 acts that have been passed by the state legislature that have to do with education.”

Smith said the board would discuss the results of newly passed legislation that will change the amounts of money provided to students as part of the Arkansas Scholarship Lottery.

Under the new law scholarship amounts will be changed to a tiered structure depending on students’ academic classification. Scholarships will start at \$2,000 per year for incoming freshmen, and increase each year that a student advances.

Smith said that the board will vote on approval of new employment contracts for certified and classified staff for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Rooney, teacher at South Side High, wins state award (Van Buren County Democrat)

Lori Rooney, Family and Consumer Science teacher at South Side High School in Van Buren County, is the 2013 Arkansas Ag-in-the-Classroom Outstanding Teacher.

Rooney received the award April 3 during a special assembly at school with fellow teachers, administrators and students in attendance as Arkansas Farm Bureau leaders made the presentation.

Every year an Arkansas teacher is recognized with a plaque commemorating the honor. These teachers successfully integrate agricultural concepts into their curricula to teach students about how agriculture fits into their daily lives. Rooney exemplified this by stating, "Being the leading industry in Arkansas, it is vital for me to express to my students the importance of agriculture and how it plays such a big role in everyone's daily life. It is a part of everything around us from the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, to the fuel in our vehicles."

Rooney utilizes unique and innovative approaches to advance agricultural awareness in her classroom. Her classes include food and nutrition labs, career orientation, nutrition and wellness, family and consumer science, leadership and service learning, child development and human relations. She offers activities and projects both in class and outside the classroom integrating field trips and guest speakers. Her students compete in both state and county contests and the district and state STARS events for FACS students winning state and national recognition.

Rooney received an expense-paid trip to Minneapolis to represent Arkansas at the National Ag-in-the-Classroom Conference in June. While there she will be able to network with other teachers selected to represent their states. She will attend workshops, learning labs, agriculture traveling tours, and hear speakers. She also will experience the selection of the National AITC Teacher of the Year Awards. In addition to her trip she was given a check for \$500.

Van Buren Can't Afford To Wait To Start Sober School Program, School Board Told (Southwest Times Record, Fort Smith)

An after-school program for planned Hope Academy, Arkansas' first sober high school, was started first because the community cannot afford to wait to address the substance abuse issue, academy Director Karen Beckner told Van Buren School Board members Tuesday.

"We can't wait until we know how it'll look to start it ... or until we can afford it. We just need to start it," Beckner said.

Right now, she said, Hope Academy is an idea of a sober school within Van Buren's school system. It is the idea that children could come back out of substance abuse treatment to a sober school rather than to their former school, improving their chances of avoiding a relapse, Beckner said.

According to Beckner, the national relapse rate of a teen in recovery is 50 percent to 90 percent. However, with teens who participated in alternative peer groups between 2007 and 2010, the relapse rate fell to 8 percent to 11 percent. That was the impetus for beginning the ROC 180 after-school program, she said.

ROC stands for Recovery Off Campus, and that program is in full swing until 4:30 p.m. three days a week. She said it uses the arts and projects-based learning to engage students in learning and maintaining their recovery.

Teen drug use is more prevalent than most people think, Beckner said, noting there are up to 30 students in Van Buren’s Alternative Learning Environment/Career Academy now who are wearing electronic ankle monitors, on probation, there through court order, and there are several more in the ROC program who are not listed as being in substance abuse recovery. However, in conversations with those additional students, many cite drugs in their backgrounds.

The hope is to start a daylong high school program that will begin each day with a group meeting. Needed are four teachers, but there is no funding available yet for that, Beckner said.

Superintendent Merle Dickerson said administrators are eyeing unessential staff trimming elsewhere, hoping to free up funding.

Senate Passes Bill to Study Impact of the Arts in Education (KARK, Channel 4)

Video posted at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=652372

LITTLE ROCK, AR -- The Arkansas Senate passed a bill on Tuesday that aims to study the impact of the arts in education.

The bill passed with hardly any opposition, and will give \$2 million to the Arkansas A+ Program, a five-year program which blends various forms of the arts into everyday classroom learning.

The bill now moves to Governor Beebe's desk.

Independence County rejects school millages (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Independence County voters Tuesday declined millage increases at two school districts that wanted to bolster campus security.

In the Cedar Ridge School District, which consists of campuses in Newark, Oil Trough and Cord in eastern Independence County, voters turned down a 1 mill increase.

Complete but unofficial results were: FOR 111 AGAINST 239

In the Batesville School District, voters rejected a 1.25-mill increase.

Complete but unofficial results were: FOR 151 AGAINST 851

Cedar Ridge School District administrators said money from the millage increase would have gone toward hiring a second resource officer and to upgrade security cameras in buses and school buildings.

The school district property tax rate is 38.2 mills.

Ann Webb, superintendent at Cedar Ridge, expressed both disappointment and understanding after hearing the election results.

"The people have spoken," she said Tuesday night. "We are in hard economic times right now, and I feel like people just don't want to pay anymore taxes."

At the Batesville district, officials said the proposed millage increase would have been used to install magnetic keycard entrances to all buildings. In addition, security cameras would have been added to the facilities, as well as fencing and communication systems to the county sheriff's emergency dispatch.

The Batesville School District District currently collects 38.75 mills.

Webb and Randy Willison, superintendent at Batesville, said the idea for beefed-up security measures is in response to the December massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

Like Webb, Willison said Tuesday night that he was disappointed by the vote, "but we trust the voters, and we will follow their wishes."

"We understand their position. They did not vote no because they did not want kids to be safe. They believe they are being taxed enough, and I definitely understand that. We did our best to put together the most cost-efficient security plan."

The superintendents said they will try to explore grant opportunities to add security measures at their campuses, though both acknowledged the difficulty of securing grants in tough economic times.

"I have a grant writer, and we are going to put her to work and see what we can come up with," Webb said. "We will do the best we can with what we have and move forward."

New guidelines for science teachers stress depth over rote (Kansas City Star, Kansas City, MO)

A new set of goals unveiled Tuesday for what all American students should know about science could change the way it is taught, from kindergarten through high school.

The voluntary measures, the first in more than 15 years, are intended to give students a basic understanding of core ideas in science and how scientists work. Developed by Achieve, a nonpartisan education advocacy group, in collaboration with 26 states, they cover fewer topics but in greater depth, building in complexity from grade to grade.

They are meant to be a good foundation for students who go on in science fields and everyone else as well.

"I think it's an opportunity to engage students in critical thinking and the kind of learning that's going to stick with them for life, rather than a lot of facts and figures," said Donald Boesch, a professor of marine science and president of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science.

The core areas in the new standards are the physical sciences, life sciences, the application of science in technology and engineering, and Earth and space science.

David Evans, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, which was involved in writing the standards, said a big part of the new way of teaching science will be emphasis on the scientific process.

“The basis of science is understanding how you accumulate evidence, assemble that evidence and observation to construct a logical argument, and come up with a defensible conclusion about the way the world works,” Evans said. “I think we’d see a lot less controversy over the findings of science – in whatever field it might be – if people understood how science is conducted.”

One of them more controversial topics in science has been climate change, and it is part of the new standards under Earth science.

Mark McCaffrey, programs and policy director at the National Center for Science Education in Oakland, Calif., said that most people get “scattered bits of information” about climate change, “but that doesn’t lend itself to informed decision-making.”

The vast majority of scientists who study the climate have concluded that the accumulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are mainly responsible for a long-term increase in global average temperature.

But others claim the science behind climate change is inconclusive or politically motivated. Some, like radio host Rush Limbaugh, call it a hoax. Free market advocacy groups, such as the Heartland Institute, argue that climate change is uncertain and should be taught as a debate. In Washington, the issue is so politically divisive that it’s hardly mentioned.

No states are obligated to adopt the standards. The funding for developing them was provided mainly by the Carnegie Foundation, according to Achieve.

The basis for the new standards is a report by the National Research Council in 2011, “A Framework for K-12 Science Education.” The council, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, said at the time that its report “identifies the key scientific ideas and practices all students should learn by the end of high school. The framework will serve as the foundation for new K-12 science education standards, to replace those issued more than a decade ago.”

Evans said the new standards would require “a lot of professional development for teachers” to help them learn new material and teach in new ways.

Frank Niepold, co-chair of the Climate Education Interagency Working Group at the U.S. Global Change Research Program, said the climate change portion could be challenging, because many teachers don’t have a background in Earth sciences and don’t know what materials are reliable.

“It’s a really tall order for teachers right now,” he said. “What this does is it provides them some guidance . . . on where the science is coming from.”

Matt Varvir of the Alliance for Climate Education, who talks to students in his native Dallas-Fort Worth area about climate change, said he’s been surprised to hear of very little pressure from parents on teachers not to teach climate science.

“I was expecting to have some problems with that,” Varvir said. “I’m more concerned with getting students motivated and less apathetic.”

The 26 states that helped write the new standards are: Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia.