



Advocates for Community and Rural Education

Senator Jack Crumbly (see inside story) has been inspiring rural parents, children, and activists with the following creed for many years.

I Believe

I still believe with the right resources we can educate children everywhere—

With the power to choose the work they do,

To grow and have the larger view,

To know and feel that they are free,

To stand erect, not bow the knee,

To accept no welfare from the state,

To be the masters of their fate,

To dare, to risk, to win—to make their own careers begin,

To serve the world in their own way

And gain in wisdom every day.

Mediocrity is for the average man,

And we'll let others settle for less;

But with opportunity for all,

We'll set *all* of Arkansas' children on a quest

To be the very best.

* * *

Beloved all over the eastern Delta of Arkansas for the many opportunities he has given children as an educator since 1969, Jack Crumbly is known for having a commitment to education and the energy and drive to innovate.

Jack Crumbly was born in Widener, AR, the youngest of eleven children. Like many of his age and time, he grew up on the farm, working in the fields chopping and picking cotton.

After graduating from AM&N (Now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff), with a double major in agriculture and biology, he taught school in various Delta communities, including Cotton Plant, Forrest City, Wheatly, and Wabbaseka.

(SEE Crumbly, page 5)

Arkansas Rural Teacher Honored Nationally

"It's the greatest honor I've ever had," says Reggie Fryar, the 2006 Arkansas Rural Teacher of the year, and subsequently the National Rural Education Association Teacher of the Year. He looks forward to traveling this year to represent Arkansas as the National Rural Teacher of the Year.

Fryar, a 25-year veteran social studies teacher, has spent his entire career at tiny, rural Van-Cove School (400 students K-12).

Fryar holds Bachelor and Master's Degrees from Henderson State University and certification in library science from Southern Arkansas University and the University of Utah.

Like other rural teachers, Fryar wears many hats. In addition to teaching high school social studies, including AP classes, Fryar is the girls' softball coach and keeps the basketball score book for away games, runs the clock for home basketball games, serves as senior class sponsor, and is the Academic Quiz Bowl Coach. His Quiz Bowl teams have won three consecutive state Quiz Bowl championships. He also teaches part-time at Rich Mountain Community College.

Although citing being named Arkansas Rural



Arkansas Rural Teacher of the Year and National Rural Teacher of the Year Reggie Fryar

Teacher of the Year as his greatest honor, it is by no means his only recognition. Fryar was Outstanding Teacher in Training at Henderson State University in 1980, Van-Cove Favorite Teacher 1985-2006, American Legion Teacher of the Year nominee in 1990, Arkansas Olds Teacher of the Year in 1990, Van-Cove Teacher of the Year in 1991, American Legion High School Teacher Runner-Up in 1992, Arkansas Teacher of the Year nominee in 1990, 1992, and 1993, and Van-Cove Beta Club Millennium Teacher of the Year in 2000.

Fryar says the national teaching award has garnered him job offers from six different states, but he has no plans to take any of

them up at this time.

Wherever he goes, Fryar maintains he wants to teach in a rural setting. Despite higher pay in larger schools, he cherishes the personal connections students and teachers make in a small rural school and feels students benefit from the smaller class sizes.

"Mr. Fryar is simply an amazing teacher and I know he has shaped my world in a positive way," states one of his students.

Fryar is no fan of school consolidation, pointing out that it took 20 years for the combined schools of Vandervoort and Cove, five miles apart, to blend into one academic community at the present Van-Cove school.

Former telecommunications worker finds fulfillment as community organizer

Dorothy Singleton was born in Sherrill, AR, the fourth of twelve children. As a teenager she dreamed of getting out of Arkansas and having a successful career. She chopped cotton for \$3 a day to buy a ticket on a Greyhound bus going to Indianapolis, IN, the day after graduating from Fred Martin High School in Altheimer, AR, in 1969.

Singleton spent the next eight years working for Indiana Bell before transferring to Atlanta, GA, where she finished her career in 2001. During that time she had also spent 16 years in the Army Reserves. She has two grown sons.

After retiring in 2001, Singleton came back to Arkansas because she had been doing volunteer work in At-

lanta, and she decided she wanted to spend her time making life better for people in the area where she was from.

“Arkansas was always home to me,” she says. “I still felt like a rural person.”

Singleton got involved in the Save Our Schools rallies during the consolidation wars of 2003 and 2004, and eventually ended up as an organizer on behalf of Advocates for Community and Rural Education for the Rural School and Com-



ACRE organizer Dorothy Singleton relaxes between assignments

munity Trust.

“What amazes me,” says Singleton, “is that in 39 of our 50 states our leadership sees no value in education in rural areas, wanting us to become urban in our outlook.”

Yet, she adds, “The thing that is said to me over and over by parents of children in rural areas is that they value the small setting where their child is a person, not a number.”

On any given day, Dorothy Singleton can be found in rural communities and small towns across the Delta educating, organizing, and encouraging people to band together to preserve their small and rural schools.

Jimmy Cunningham: From small school superintendent to national activist

Four years ago Jimmy Cunningham was the superintendent of a small, obscure school in the mountains of west central Arkansas. That was before history caught up with him and catapulted him to the forefront of the fight to save all small and rural schools in this very rural state.

Since then, among rural school activists, he has reached legendary status as a leader who speaks with authority and conviction about the role and value of small and rural schools, not only in the state of Arkansas, but in national educational circles as well.

Cunningham grew up in Plainview, AR, and returned to his alma mater, Plainview-Rover School, as K-12 principal in 1985 after stints as basketball coach at Jasper and Wonderview.

He assumed the superintendency in 1994 and in the nine years he held that position oversaw the complete remodeling of the early twentieth century campus. He built two pre-schools, a birth to two-year-old facility and a three-four year old facility.

Under his tenure the school also built a new Agri building, renovating

the old one into classrooms. The historic high school building received a complete make-over that included modern, energy-efficient windows, heating and cooling systems, and lighting.

The school’s façade and a gem of an auditorium that dates back almost a hundred years retain their unique character.

In this low-wealth district, much of the renovation was done with grants, while the community never turned down a millage or bond issue to improve their school.

Cunningham was pre-president-elect of the Arkansas Rural Education Association in 2003 when Governor Huckabee made his infamous proposal to consolidate all schools with under 1500 enrollment. Never having been politically active before, he spent countless hours along with other rural school activists at the Capitol pressing for the right of rural people to retain their schools.



Jimmy Cunningham with Speaker of the House Benny Petrus and President of the Senate Jack Critcher

Although often vilified by the self-serving statewide press, to other rural people he became a hero who championed their cause and their kids selflessly and with honor and integrity.

Taking up his role as president of the rural education association, he networked with other groups to defeat consolidation, meeting on weekends and in the evenings and traveling to Save Our Schools rallies around the state.

(SEE Cunningham , cont. on p. 5)

Senator Jack Crumbly—in it for the children (cont from p. 1)

Crumbly left teaching from 1978 to 1986, as he says “to satisfy that entrepreneurial spirit in me.” For eight years he operated restaurants in Brinkley and Forrest City, an experience that would lead him to introduce several innovative vocational training programs when he returned to education.

After teaching science from 1986 to 1989 at Earle and Lee County, serving as middle school assistant principal for three years and superintendent at Wabaseka for one year, Crumbly became superintendent at Earle in 1993.

Crumbly’s many accomplishments include a very effective peer tutorial program called RISE/MOVE, for which he received a Presidential Award from the U.S. Department of Labor.

In 1997 under his leadership, Earle built a new \$4.2M high school with a tre-

mendous 13.2 mil tax increase for which Crumbly campaigned door-to-door in this community in which 95% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch and which has a poverty rate of over 40%.

“God has blessed us,” says Crumbly. “We’re a small Delta town without a stop light...or many opportunities for employment. Our school does so much more than teaching the ABC’s and 123’s. The school is the only place in town with a gym, an auditorium, or a cafeteria. We’re the focal point of the community.”

Jack Crumbly embarked on a new career in 2006 when he ran for state Senate and won. He says he realized after the historic 2003 legislative session how important it is for educators to take part in the political process, to advocate for fair and adequate funding, and to testify before committees about school needs, and



Senator Jack Crumbly—educator, education activist, and public servant

his board supports him in this. He stipulates that he does not draw a salary from the school while at the legislature.

Continuing his advocacy in other ways, Senator Crumbly is also president of the Arkansas African American Administrators Association and serves on the board of Advocates for Community and Rural Education.

Outstanding Dermott student Chavares Block

Chavares Block, the senior class president at Dermott, has been called “one of our most outstanding male students” by a teacher at the school, and with good reason.

Chavares is fourth in his class with a GPA of 3.5. He is a four-year recipient of the regional Harris Gregory Math Award. With math being his best and favorite subject, he plans to attend UCA or UAF and major in Engineering.

As president of his senior class, Chavares is lobbying to have the senior class trip that was abandoned five years ago reinstated, and he has helped raise funds

for it. He was turned on to the political process last year when he attended Boys State and learned leadership skills, how government works, what makes a bill, and how to get a bill passed. He ended up being elected to a top leadership position at Boys State.

Chavares’ father, and OTR truck driver, helps him with his hobby, restoring old cars. At present they are restoring a ‘51 Chevy pickup, a ‘64 Chevy Impala, and a ‘71 Dodge Charger.

Chavares is a member of Second Chance Ministries in McGeehee, where he participates in Youth Sunday once a



month.

He likes attending a small school, he says, because “there your teachers know your character and who you are as an individual. They will not just look at you and make assumptions about what you are like.”

CUNNINGHAM, cont.

During his tempestuous four-year term for AREA in which school consolidation efforts were beat back again and again, Cunningham assisted and encouraged the formation of a rural teachers organization, Rural Teachers of Arkansas, and a community activists organization, Advocates for Community and Rural Education. (Cunningham’s wife, Kerry, also an educator and education activist, helped found and is president of ACRE.)

In 2004 under Cunningham’s leadership, the Arkansas Rural Education Association established the award to honor

the Arkansas Rural Teacher of the Year.

At the same time he joined the board of the National Rural Education Association and is on the NREA Legislative Committee.

Sadly, after all his efforts, Cunningham’s school was caught up in the Act 60 consolidations in 2004 and merged into a larger district. After a year as assistant superintendent, Cunningham moved on to Danville, where he enjoys the challenge presented by the opportunity to grow, expand, and improve.

Having gained a lot of political savvy over the past four years, Cunningham

contemplates running for office himself someday in order to continue to be an influence for small and rural schools.

Few people have given as much of themselves for the cause of rural schools in Arkansas as Jimmy Cunningham. From small school superintendent to national activist, he undoubtedly deserves his

Cunningham at ACRE regional meeting with education activists Kerry Cunningham, Ron Crawford, and Lavina Grandon



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Leslie's Community in Action (CIA) a model for school involvement

The hallway of Leslie school is lined with plaques that testify to the academic success of this very small Searcy County school.

Before being consolidated with its larger neighbor, Marshall, by Act 60 in 2004, Leslie school was known as one of the best small schools in the state. In fact, at the time of their consolidation, they were listed as the third best in the state based on test scores, while their receiving district was much lower at 72.

As a result, citizens of Leslie at first weren't alarmed when forced to merge with their neighbor to the north. They thought their reputation for excellence, the geographic barrier of Backbone Mountain between the two schools, their isolated status, and the purported intent of the law would protect them from closure.

They found out how wrong they were when the Searcy County School Board (of the merged district) voted in December 2005 to gradually close the Leslie High School campus.

It's a familiar story by now. Citing the financial hardship of keeping the Leslie campus open, the superintendent asked the board to begin closing Leslie High School in June of 2006 and complete the move by the end of the 2007-2008 school year.

Community leader Tonya Ussery says, "When [the Searcy County School Board at] Marshall voted to close our school, they brought it up, seconded it, and voted on it in one meeting" without any discussion or preparation. The plan was to take grades nine through twelve to Marshall for half a day in the 2006-2007 school year and to take grades seven through twelve for the full day in 2007-08.

Students in high school go to Marshall now for core classes and return to Leslie for athletics, study hall, and some vocational classes. "It's pretty much turned our school into a day-care," says Ussery.

Once they recognized the danger, citizens of Leslie asked Superintendent Andrew Vining for a public meeting to discuss the proposed closing of their school. After getting no satisfaction, they decided in February 2006 to take steps of their own and formed Community in Action, a group that now has about 32 active members.

The CIA immediately began holding monthly meetings, raising money, and searching for evidence to bolster the case

for their school's survival. They joined the larger state-wide rural school advocacy group, Advocates for Community and Rural Education.

For an organization which has been in existence for less than one year, the Leslie CIA has an impressive list of activities.

With various fundraisers, including a donkey ballgame, they have raised \$6,500 to fund the fight to save their school. They have sponsored a range of other measures from running a school board candidate to participating in activities to boost community spirit and involvement and maintaining a sense of school spirit and identity at the Leslie school campus.

(SEE Leslie CIA, inside supplement)



Leslie chapter leader Tonya Ussery and husband Dennis participate in ACRE leadership meetings.