the Civitas

CIVILITY AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

The will to be polite, to maintain civility and normalcy, is fearfully strong. I wonder sometimes how much evil is permitted to run unchecked simply because it would be rude to interrupt it.

Alix E. Harrow
The Ten Thousand Doors of January

2023-2026



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111 Research Drive • Columbia, SC 29203

803.799.6607

the Civitas

is a biennial publication of the **South Carolina School Boards Association** designed to highlight school board members who serve their communities through leadership and civic engagement.

Inclusion in this publication or the **Civility Ambassadors Program** is for informational purposes only and does not imply endorsement of any individual or organization.

Civility Ambassador selection criteria

- Must be in **good standing** with their local board/district.
- Must have served **at least four years** either on the board or in support of the school district where they now serve.
- Must have demonstrated **meaningful impact** on students, schools or the community.
- Must have been recognized or nominated by peers, educators or community leaders for **exemplary service**.
- Must have no known governance concerns.

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About *The Civitas*

Ever wonder where the people are who can disagree with you in the boardroom without being disagreeable and still ask you to lunch the next day?



Angela Crosland
SCSBA Director of Communications

Civility is often described as a value. In practice, it is a discipline.

In today's climate, where disagreement is easy and division is amplified, the work of school board members across South Carolina reminds us civility is not passive. It is intentional. It is practiced in boardrooms, in communities and in the everyday moments where leadership is tested most.

This issue of *The Civitas* highlights individuals who have chosen to lead with purpose. Through the Civility Ambassadors program, we recognize board members who move beyond policy and position to model respect, service and solution-oriented leadership in every space they occupy.

Inside these pages, you will meet leaders defined not only by their titles, but by their impact—serving families, strengthening communities and demonstrating what effective governance looks like when grounded in civility. Their stories reflect a broader truth: public education is strongest when leadership is both principled and people-centered.

This publication also reflects our ongoing commitment as an association. We are not only advocating for quality public education, we are equipping those entrusted to lead it. Civility is central to this work.

As you read, consider not only the stories shared, but the standard they set. Civility is not reserved for moments of agreement. It is most powerful in moments of difference. And it is there, in those moments, leadership matters most.

About the Program

While SCSBA has long recognized the dedication and service of school board members, the Ambassador Program has allowed us to honor these leaders in a deeper and more meaningful way. Since the program's inception in 2023, SCSBA has celebrated individuals who go above and beyond in their communities—leaders who exemplify civility, service and compassion both inside and outside the boardroom.

At every conference, SCSBA recognizes board members whose impact extends far beyond public education. Through the power of storytelling, we shine a spotlight on their contributions in healthcare, nonprofits, housing, faith-based organizations and countless other areas where they devote their time, talent and resources to improving lives.



Scott Price
SCSBA Executive Director

These leaders embody the values of the Civility Initiative, demonstrating that leadership is not just about governance, it is about service, respect and building stronger communities.

You may call them school board members. We call them Ambassadors because they carry the spirit of civility wherever they serve.

Meet the SCSBA Ambassadors.

SCSBA Executive Committee



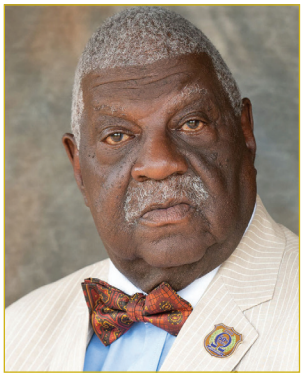
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President, Abbeville



Janet Graham
President-elect, Horry



Scott Childers
Secretary/Treasurer, York



Charles Govan
Immediate Past President, Darlington

the Civitas

2023

CIVILITY AMBASSADORS

#civilityambassadors

Servant leader: A box made especially for Beverly Bonaparte



Olar, located in western Bamberg County and just 10 miles south of Denmark, boasts a whopping 257 residents, according to the most recent census. Among its residents is Bamberg County School Board Trustee Beverly Bonaparte.

Known by many for her devotion to public education, as she's served her local board since 2016, Bonaparte is becoming increasingly identified with the food pantry sponsored by her church, Amazing Grace Ministries, Golden Harvest Food Bank and FoodShare Bamberg, which opened a few years ago to service the residents of Bamberg County, S.C. Recently appointed its director, Bonaparte volunteers her time during the week organizing food pickups in preparation for the Saturday morning distribution from noon until 2 p.m.

"We pick up breads, vegetables, fruit, meats – everything that you can put in a box for a family to have a complete meal," said Bonaparte. "We service anywhere from 147, 150, sometimes up to 200 people."

At the onset, the pantry only accommodated the residents of Bamberg County. The outpour of support has been so overwhelming, residents of neighboring counties have been invited to take part.

"To me it's a blessing because working in the food pantry – to see how the people are so receptive and faithful," Bonaparte said. "We are the first people (they) see. (For) some of them, our boxes are the only boxes they are going to get for that week and there is such a need for the food."

The trips to retail stores and other distributors as far away as Aiken, S.C. are all worth it to Bonaparte, who considers herself fortunate to have been afforded the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

"I wouldn't trade it for the world," said Bonaparte.

"We pick up breads, vegetables, fruit, meats – everything that you can put in a box for a family to have a complete meal. We service anywhere from 147, 150, sometimes up to 200 people."

She's especially grateful for volunteer staff members who carry out their duties with excellence and in the words of one of the staff members, "(There is) a box made especially for you."

Food distribution takes place at 202 Beech Avenue in Denmark, S.C. and all are invited to partake and participate.

RETURN TO TOC

How to reach the masses? Dr. Brent Powers serves personnel, patients, parents and pupils

The parking lot of Lexington Medical Center is consistently filled and yet always has room for just one more car. The concept aptly applies to the work of the facility's Senior Vice President and System Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brent Powers, whose professional capacity tends to expand as the organization does. He began as a physician, was promoted to vice president of patient safety and quality improvement and was promoted again to his current role in less than 20 years.

On January 6, 1971, Lexington County Hospital, as it was first called, housed 125 beds and employed 250 people. Today, Lexington Medical Center is a 607-bed hospital and employs a staff of more than 7,800 healthcare professionals. Entrusted by its board of directors to lead the way is Powers, who also happens to serve on the Lexington School District One board of trustees, a post he has held since 2012.

Powers says his packed schedule is due in large part to his desire to serve.

"It's easy to sit on the sidelines and complain about the way the world is, and I get that some people can't get in the ring, but I chose to not sit on the sidelines and to get in the ring and try to make it better," said Powers. "I am also a deep believer that at the end of my days I want someone to say good and faithful son, so service is an obvious way to do that."

"It's easy to sit on the sidelines and complain about the way the world is, and I get that some people can't get in the ring, but I chose to not sit on the sidelines and to get in the ring and try to make it better."

As Powers graces the halls of the facility each day, he is ever mindful of the impact he has made. From the retired school



principal who recalls the care he provided for his parents during their transition, to the staff member who taps him on the shoulder just to greet him, at every few steps, Powers senses the effect he has on his surroundings. The goal, according to him, is to continue the work of leadership development in himself and among those he encounters both personally and professionally. Though 30 to 40 percent of his work is clinical, he invests much of his time developing leaders.

When cultivating leaders from among the ranks at the hospital and within the cohort of medical students who are completing their residencies, Powers said it is important for them to be readers and to be curious.

"Reading about things gives you a flavor for what the truth is and having a curious mindset is important because it challenges your personal growth and endears others to you," said Powers. "Generally, if you go to someone with an air of

curiosity, they open up and share versus if you engage in a personal interaction with an air of authority, it shuts the conversation down."

Powers said employing this wisdom helps up and coming leaders to learn where they are needed and where they are most effective.

Powers earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in chemistry (German minor) from Wake Forest University, the Doctor of Medicine degree with honors from Wake Forest University School of Medicine and the Master of Business Administration degree with distinction in finance from Wake Forest University's Babcock Graduate School of Management.

Powers and his wife Heather, who is also a physician, have three daughters who are all products of Lexington School District One.

RETURN TO TOC

"Together, we will be more intentional about infusing the principles of civility into our every endeavor in the face of the current crisis and are excited about local school boards...leading the way!"

Scott Price
SCSBA Executive Director

Longtime SSD2 board member Connie Smith: builder of education and city of Chesnee



Spartanburg School District Two Board Member Connie Smith has a quarter of a century under her belt in this capacity and is still going strong. These days though, in addition to her service on the board, she wears a tool belt around her waist as a licensed mechanical contractor, head of revitalization efforts in the city of Chesnee and builder of sea walls in Beaufort County.

An avid supporter of public education, even her newest undertakings are born from her love of education.

"Education is the key that opens doors for those of us that would otherwise not be allowed to enter," said Smith.

In her mind, efforts to revitalize the city of Chesnee carry a similar notion.

"I decided to put a committee together and try to make the community and area a more family-friendly and welcoming town with more amenities," she said. "I would like to see our kids that graduate and leave for college want to return and become local citizens in their hometown."

Smith is the executive director of the Chesnee Area Development Association (CADA), a position which pays nothing monetarily but yields huge dividends in personal satisfaction. Local merchants and other residents have come alongside Smith to serve as vice president, secretary, treasurer and chief of marketing.

Efforts to rebuild the city are not foreign to Smith who for years now has owned and operated her contracting business. It affords her the opportunity to oversee the completion of building projects involving mechanical elements.

"I have several rental properties that I own and manage and am currently renovating a small house in Chesnee for an Airbnb (Air Bed and Breakfast)," said Smith. "I am studying to get my residential contractor's license so I can build a couple of tiny homes."

"Education is the key that opens doors for those of us that would otherwise not be allowed to enter."

The beginnings of her contracting business can be traced back to the 16 years she and her former husband of 25 years owned a plumbing business.

"I decided to stay home after my son started school and help my husband in the (plumbing) business. He retired early and I took over the business," said Smith. "I recently sold (the) business so I could travel and spend time with my grandchildren."

She did so only to pick up all these other responsibilities along the way, including the building and re-building of a seawall at a property she purchased on the coast of St. Helena Island near Beaufort.

"The seawall is needed to prevent the water from encroaching and washing away the dirt. I hired a seawall builder to build a 200-foot wall and he did a terrible job," Smith said.



Photo 1: *June 2024 Civility Ambassador Dr. "Tina" Gwozdz (left) of Beaufort County School District with Lynne Fallaw of Lexington School District Four and June 2025 Civility Ambassador Maggie James of Chester County School District* • **Photo 2:** *May 2026 Civility Ambassador Dr. Julia Mims of Florence School District Three* • **Photo 3:** *September 2025 Civility Ambassador Naomi Eckels (right) of Bamberg County School District*

The wall fell due to the waves within one month of completion, according to Smith.

"The builder had to return and start over with me purchasing the material again and him supplying the labor. I am determined to have the wall structurally sound at completion." said Smith, who is the consummate teacher.

After graduating from Converse College with a master's degree in education, Smith taught 8th grade history. She went on to work at the University of South Carolina – Upstate under a federal program targeting at-risk students.

"(I) helped them become first-generation college students," said Smith. "It was a rewarding job as I could relate to my students because I was a first-generation college graduate."

Her sons, one biological and another she raised, and their wives and children, ensure Smith's legacy of building education and structures continues. They can be found collaborating with her on any number of endeavors, particularly in the city of Chesnee, which Smith describes as, "A small town with a hometown feel with much potential."

RETURN TO TOC

John Galloway: Veteran educator lends helping hand to veterans

Imagine being able to assist people with housing, healthcare, education, disability, burial, life and other benefits as a profession and all under one umbrella. Now, imagine helping those who have served in the armed forces to secure those benefits. It is a profession Florence School District One Board Member John Galloway never dreamed he would have, and in fact, landed after an offhanded comment to the previous executive director of Florence County Veterans Affairs (VA) Office six years ago.

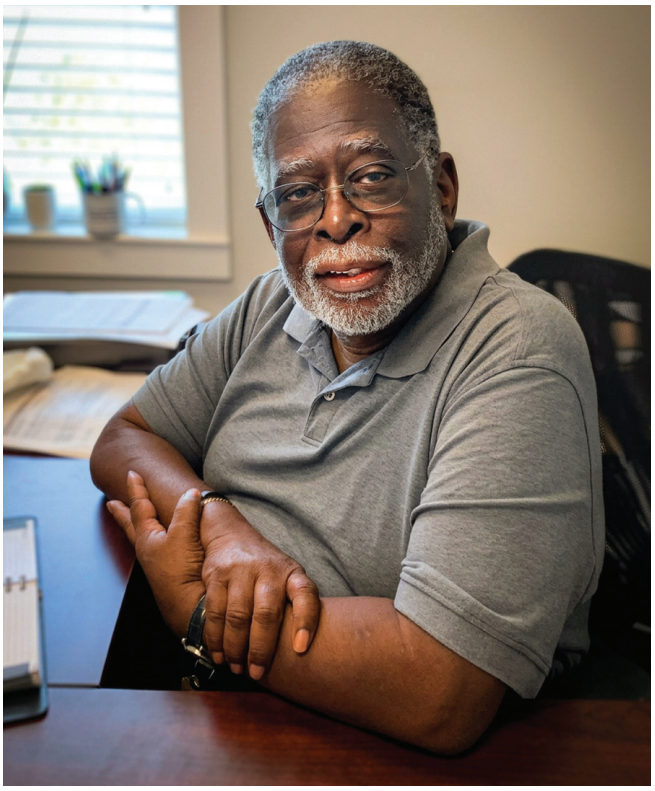
Of his work as a VA representative, Galloway said, "If you come to work, you are going to accomplish something for veterans and then for you, too."

Galloway said his primary function is to assist veterans and their dependents, particularly those who served during times of war, by completing paperwork to obtain benefits entitled to them by law.

"Our biggest thing is, we write claims," he said.

Even in assisting veterans, Galloway derives satisfaction from empowering veterans to utilize technology to help themselves, citing instances where even those who are considered among the elderly were able to walk through the process on their own.

Forever the steward, Galloway also serves as caregiver for his wife Geneva who is recovering from an extended illness. He may not have dreamed of the job and responsibilities he now has, but there is one thing for which he has given considerable thought.



"In a perfect world, I'd like to see everyone getting along and when you look at the things that are happening now, all the killings," Galloway said. "If people would just understand that if we all just could get along a little bit better, life would be a whole lot easier."

It is a belief he has carried with him wherever he serves or is employed, said Galloway.

Not one given to resting on his laurels, Galloway was briefly employed as a driver for a local rental car company when he retired from Florence One where he taught law enforcement classes for 10 years. A 12-year stint with the Florence and Charleston County sheriff offices primed him for the position just as his 26 years of service in the U.S. Navy readied him for his current one.

"If you come to work, you are going to accomplish something for veterans and then for you too."

As for what is next, Galloway plans to continue serving on the school board of which he has been a member since 2017, in the community in which he has become well established. Though born in Horry County, Galloway grew up and is highly vested in Florence County.

In addition to his service on the board, he serves as a deacon at his church and a member of various other ministries; lay member of the Pee Dee Baptist Association; and District 7 Commander for the American Legion, which encompasses portions of Florence and Darlington counties.

RETURN TO TOC

"I believe education is the cornerstone of success. I want to be part of a system which not only prepares our students for the challenges of tomorrow but helps them grow as individuals with the skills and confidence to succeed."

Justin Farnsworth
May 2025 Civility Ambassador
Dorchester School District Two

Sylvia Harrison: Building a Foundation for Fairfield

Whether in the town of Blythewood, Ridgeway or Winnsboro, Sylvia D. Harrison, Fairfield County School District Board of Trustees vice chair, is a highly recognizable name, which when mentioned, conjures immediate smiles. In addition to serving on the board for the past seven years, the hairstylist and owner of Sylvia's Designs Unlimited has been a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president and School Improvement Council (SIC), First Steps and NAACP board member.

Harrison's service in Fairfield County led to her sponsoring the county's premier fundraising event, which has garnered the support of legislators, educators and various other stakeholders throughout the region.

"I actually started my own foundation, my scholarships," said Harrison.

Sylvia's Foundation was launched more than 13 years ago and sponsors an annual gala which provides scholarships to students in the county.

"I include everybody because we are all in Fairfield County but that's my passion and being in my own business gives me the opportunity to just be a little bit more flexible," said Harrison.

"I made enough money to put three girls through college ... it actually gave me an opportunity to be more involved in the community and the schools."

Just looking at Harrison, it is difficult to imagine her being a cosmetologist for more than 35 years but 87-year-old Betty Gunthrope, a customer since Sylvia's Designs Unlimited's inception, said she can attest. Gunthrope said she's seen Harrison work her business, serve as a board member and volunteer in several capacities throughout those 35 years or more.

"She is a good worker. She's a hard worker. Very clean. Very organized," said Gunthrope. "I wish she would do a little bit more (here) though. I want her



out of the community and back in the beauty shop because my hair needs it."

Gunthrope said she is proud of her work ethic and hopes it pays off at some point.

"She's such a hard worker," said Gunthrope. "I see so many people working and for nothing. (It) doesn't look like it's going anywhere. I hope the people understand and will work along with her."

While it looks like a lot of toiling to the observer, Harrison sees it as a way of life.

"My dad was a business owner all of his life and I followed his pattern," said Harrison. "I like doing hair and I knew it was a good living in doing hair."

And a good living it has been.

"I made enough money to put three girls through college, so that worked out good for me and it actually gave me an opportunity to be more involved in the community and the schools," said Harrison, who is a single mother of three. She successfully co-

parents with their father, Curtis Waters.

One daughter is a physician, one is a vice president for one of the largest charities in the nation and the other is an Information Technology (IT) professional. All are honor graduates of Fairfield County School District. Harrison calls her children a testament of her commitment and dedication to representing the district well and enhancing the quality of its educational resources.

"I love the children of Fairfield County and all those I'm entrusted with representing," said Harrison. "I'm so thankful to be a part of the growth under the leadership of Superintendent (Dr. J.R.) Green. I'm thankful for the love and support from all the parents, schools, and especially my Geiger family."

RETURN TO TOC

OCTOBER 2023 CIVILITY AMBASSADOR

Shanda Allen: The wings over nature and of nurture

Shanda Allen represents District 11 on the Horry County School Board, which is comprised of Aynor, Conway and Green Sea Floyds. Her reach extends beyond Horry to neighboring counties as one who has helped her husband, a former pastor, tend to two flock of congregants and one who continues to assist him with dusting crops in several states.

"I worked in the school from the time my oldest got in the school system. I volunteered. I was room mom (and) very, very involved in the schools."

On any given day at the family-owned Allen Aviation, she can be found washing, loading or programming the planes before they are dispatched.

"We have a program that if a farmer comes in or an industry needs our service, I'll map that in a GPS mapping system and email that to the plane's guidance system," said Allen. "They go out to do the job created and apply product. When the job is completed, they email the map back to me. It shows exactly where they have been, what time, the humidity, the wind (and) all that good stuff."

It is the work of the Allens which helps farmers provide nutrients and combat the presence of bugs on crops regionally, statewide and beyond. Specifically, the couple assists growers with the



aerial application of a product to protect crops from pests. These daily tasks at Allen Aviation parallel those she employed in her children's schools and in other capacities in the district, familiarizing Allen with the intricacies of education long before she was elected to the school board in 2016.

"I worked in the school from the time my oldest

got in the school system," said Allen. "I volunteered. I was room mom (and) very, very involved in the schools."

One can easily see the correlation between how Allen serves in education, in aviation and her service as the wife of a former pastor.

"My husband was a minister when we met. Actually, (our) first date, when he told me he was a minister, I thought we probably won't date long," Allen said jokingly, some 36 years later.

As a pastor's wife, Allen guided, nurtured and educated the membership on spiritual matters and in many regards, it is how Allen sees her function in every area of life, particularly education.

"I tell children all the time when we're in school and they come up to me constantly – teachers, and they'll tell you, if you ask Shanda to pray, guess what you're going to (do) right then and there?" said Allen. "We're going to lock up hands and we're going to pray."

Allen credits her faith with helping her get through her own breast cancer trial and that of several of her family members.

Of her first run for office, Allen said, "When I filed in March (2016), that May, we found out our daughter had cancer. My mom, my dad, my husband's mom and dad, all died with cancer."

Because of her daughter's diagnosis, Allen was unable to focus on the impending school board election.

"I did not campaign because you go to a place when it's your own child. (We did) a lot of praying," Allen said. "I don't remember seven days of my life because we did a lot of praying and a lot of fasting for her and God healed her."

Allen did not have to worry much about the election thereafter either.

"I didn't campaign my first campaign. God put me where he has me," said Allen. "My second campaign (term), nobody signed up to run, and I'm there until God says go home because I'm going to still do what I do regardless of what happens."

Allen said she wins either way.

"I'm still going to serve God in whatever capacity (He) needs me," she said.

RETURN TO TOC

The South Carolina School Boards Association (SCSBA) is working to help local leaders become models of how to govern best and to emphasize the basics of effective local governing, such as:

- **Running effective meetings:** We provide training and guidance on how to conduct effective school board meetings.
- **Communicating thoughtfully:** Being open, honest and transparent – making sure everyone has access to the same universe of facts – is essential for people from different backgrounds and with varying viewpoints to work together toward real solutions.
- **Building relationships:** Cultivating trusting relationships with others involved in an issue takes time, but the effort is worth it, and will pay off in the future.

Tedd Moyd: Serving out of poverty

What happened when two nuns from the Religious Sisters of Mercy moved to Hardeeville from Chicago in the late 90s and joined forces with other community leaders? According to Jasper County School District board member of 11 years, Tedd Moyd, the collaboration birthed Jasper County Neighbors United (JCNU), a non-profit designed to assist low-income and disadvantaged residents in and around Jasper County with human services ranging from affordable housing and education to community and youth development. Moyd and his wife, Mary Charles Davis, have served as chief executive officer and director of operations, respectively for JCNU for more than two decades and are founding board members.

"I knew back then that I would be involved with community service and try to make it better for the next person. I always wanted to help and be a part of anything that was good going on."

The two are looking forward to celebrating the organization's 25th anniversary next year.

"We are excited to announce it," said Moyd. "We are in the beginning and (asking) stages. Committees are being set up and volunteers sought."

Details of JCNU's abridged offerings are expected to be unveiled at the culminating black-tie celebration later next year.

"JCNU has really evolved since its inception and has steadily progressed with the leadership of its board and staff," Moyd said. "After being in business for almost 25 years, (we are) embarking on some new territory and ventures. JCNU is in the process of selling its 42-unit apartment complex as well as all properties owned."

The development has plans to return solely to its original mission of addressing housing needs in Jasper County and the city of Hardeeville. The housing services include homeownership, down payment assistance and rental accommodations.



"JCNU was created because we were the red-headed stepchild of (the region)," said Moyd. "Growth was all around us but still nothing here. It is coming (along) though and it's coming real fast too."

In the future, JCNU will turn its attention to the partnership it has had with Jasper County and the City of Hardeeville from the very beginning – to help address the housing needs in the city and county.

"JCNU came in and filled a much-needed void and assisted many residents," he said. "Together we are making a dent."

Driven by his desire to see families stabilized and safe, Moyd recalls the two-bedroom home where he lived which had no bathroom. It housed 13 people, consisting of his two parents, one uncle, seven siblings and two cousins.

"I knew back then that I would be involved with community service and try to make it better for the next person," Moyd said. "I always wanted to help and be a part of anything that was good going on."

Though certainly challenging, there were positive

byproducts of his humble beginnings, said Moyd.

"Being in a house with that many people, you had to have love because it was required to make it," said Moyd. "We all got along and made the best of what we shared."

Moyd admits not even realizing his family's impoverishment.

"I did not know that I was poor because everyone else lived the same way in my neighborhood," he said. "I (also) never felt poor because I was always studious and (had) opportunities to travel with afterschool extracurricular activities. I got to experience more than others, and I was always a curious child and willing to learn and listen."

Moyd is looking for a successor with the same inclinations to help effect change as he had as a child.

"I would like to find a young individual who is very interested in community development and turn this leadership opportunity over to them," said Moyd. "I was afforded the same opportunity, and someone gave me the chance to continue something great."

Someone with next-level thinking, commitment to the work and empathy need apply, he said.

"Leadership and dedication are key and until I can find those traits, I will be holding and praying for that someone," said Moyd. "I would like to see a fully functional office with enough staff members to handle the needs of the people who need it most – the working poor."

RETURN TO TOC

"(I) helped them become first-generation college students. It was a rewarding job as I could relate to my students because I was a first-generation college graduate."

Connie Smith
Spartanburg School District Two

Where are they now?

Shanda Allen's service on the Horry County Schools Board of Education ended in 2024, after serving more than 10 years. Allen Aviation is one of only three commercial aviation spraying businesses certified to spray mosquitoes in the Southeast, playing a vital role in environmental management.

Beverly Bonaparte's board service ended in 2024. Since then, she has been involved with the Orangeburg-Calhoun-Allendale-Bamberg Community Action Agency, Inc. (OCAB) as a Senior Companion. Through the Senior Companion Program (SCP), Beverly helps primarily older adults who may be at risk of losing their independence by providing companionship, assisting with errands, preparing meals and ensuring they aren't alone during the day. This volunteer role allows her to leverage her life experiences to make a difference in the lives of others.

John Galloway continues to be employed at the Florence County Veterans Administration Office. He also serves as a deacon at Central Baptist Church and enjoys traveling, music and sports in his free time.

Tedd Moyd's 10-year tenure on the Jasper County School Board ended in 2025 when the state took control of the district and dissolved the board in the fall of 2025. Tedd had served for more than 10 years, including time as an officer. Today, he continues to be active in local community initiatives, though his current role is not specified in the available information.

Dr. Brent Powers' service on the school board ended in 2024. He continues to serve as senior vice president and chief medical officer at Lexington Medical Center. In that capacity, Dr. Powers is involved in major regional health initiatives, including a new collaboration with the USC Brain Health Network, which is working to expand access to cognitive care in Lexington County.

Chris Revels passed away on May 28, 2025. He served on the York School District One Board of Trustees with unwavering dedication for 21 years, beginning in 2004. His steadfast commitment, thoughtful leadership and genuine care for students, staff and the community left an indelible mark across York County. Chris was also employed with the National Park Service and the S.C. Forestry Commission, contributing to the state's natural resources and environmental preservation.

Connie Smith ended her 24 years of service with Spartanburg School District Two in 2025, deciding to retire on Dec. 1, 2025. She has just returned from a wonderful trip to Greece and is now spending time with her family, specifically her four grandchildren. Recently, she planted some flowers in her yard and is awaiting the fall season to plant more. She has also adopted a dog mix.

Civility Pledge

I pledge to build a stronger and more effective school board by advocating for **civil engagement**, **respecting others** and their viewpoints and **finding solutions** for the betterment of my school district.

Christopher Revels: From the inside, an outside job

Vice Chairperson of the York School District One Board of Trustees Christopher Revels has 40 years of nationwide and international experience putting out fires in his various positions with the National Park Service and the S.C. Forestry Commission.



"I have been fortunate to have traveled across the U.S. to assist with wildland fire operations as a single resource and as a logistics section chief for the Southern Area Critical Incident Management Red Team (consisting of 20 national teams that manage large fire events and other national emergencies)," said Revels. "This year I traveled to Alberta, Canada with my team to assist with the historic wildland fires."

"Early in my life, I learned that education was more than just preparing people for college. Providing our youth with a variety of educational options and extracurricular activities is important to me."

At least 19 of those years have been devoted to serving in a position he deems equally rewarding – representing the people of Region Three of York One.

"It has been rewarding and provided me with an avenue to give back to my community," said Revels. "Early in my life, I learned that education was more than just preparing people for college. Providing our youth with a variety of educational options and extracurricular activities is important to me."

Revels said educators and family members alike contributed to his career of choice. Born and reared in rural York County, Revels said he was surrounded by so many caring people, which helped him establish his priorities.

"I always migrated to the outdoors during my youth," he said. "I suppose it all started with long walks on the farm with my grandfather. Whether it was hunting, riding horses or just hiking, I always wanted to be outside."

In his 34 years with the National Park Service, Revels was afforded the opportunity to fulfill his desire to work outdoors, where he was responsible for oversight of the fire, law enforcement, resource management and interpretive divisions. His specific daily duties included patrol and investigation oversight, planning and implementation of prescribed burning operations, invasive exotic plant eradication and cultural landscape and habitat restoration.

"I always knew I would be in a career that allowed me to spend time outdoors," he said. "I never dreamed I would have such a great career that has allowed me to see some fascinating places across the country."

Additionally, as chief ranger, Revels managed the organization's budget and provided oversight for the strategic action plan.

The teachers at Hickory Grove High School, which is now closed, encouraged him to remain focused

on his career aspirations and set high expectations for himself.

"Many of those educators have passed, but I hope they knew the positive impact that they had on me," said Revels.

In his current role as Upstate Urban Interface coordinator with the S.C. Forestry Commission, Revels' efforts are directed specifically to wildfire prevention. Revels collaborates with landowners and communities in the Upstate to identify potential hazards and develop and implement action plans to mitigate fuel loads on their properties. Wildland fire response messaging and activities are also a part of his duties.

Because of the educators and family members who supported his career decision, which proved to be just what he needed, Revels said, "I will always be an advocate for students and their career path decisions."

Revels' wife of 42 years, Vicki, is a retired special education teacher and board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA). The couple's twin sons, Cody and Will, work in law enforcement.

RETURN TO TOC

CHRIS REVELS
Dec. 29, 1958 - May 28, 2025

"I always migrated to the outdoors during my youth. I suppose it all started with long walks on the farm with my grandfather. Whether it was hunting, riding horses or just hiking, I always wanted to be outside."

Chris Revels
Vice Chairperson of the York School District One Board of Trustees

the Civitas

2024

CIVILITY AMBASSADORS

#civilityambassadors

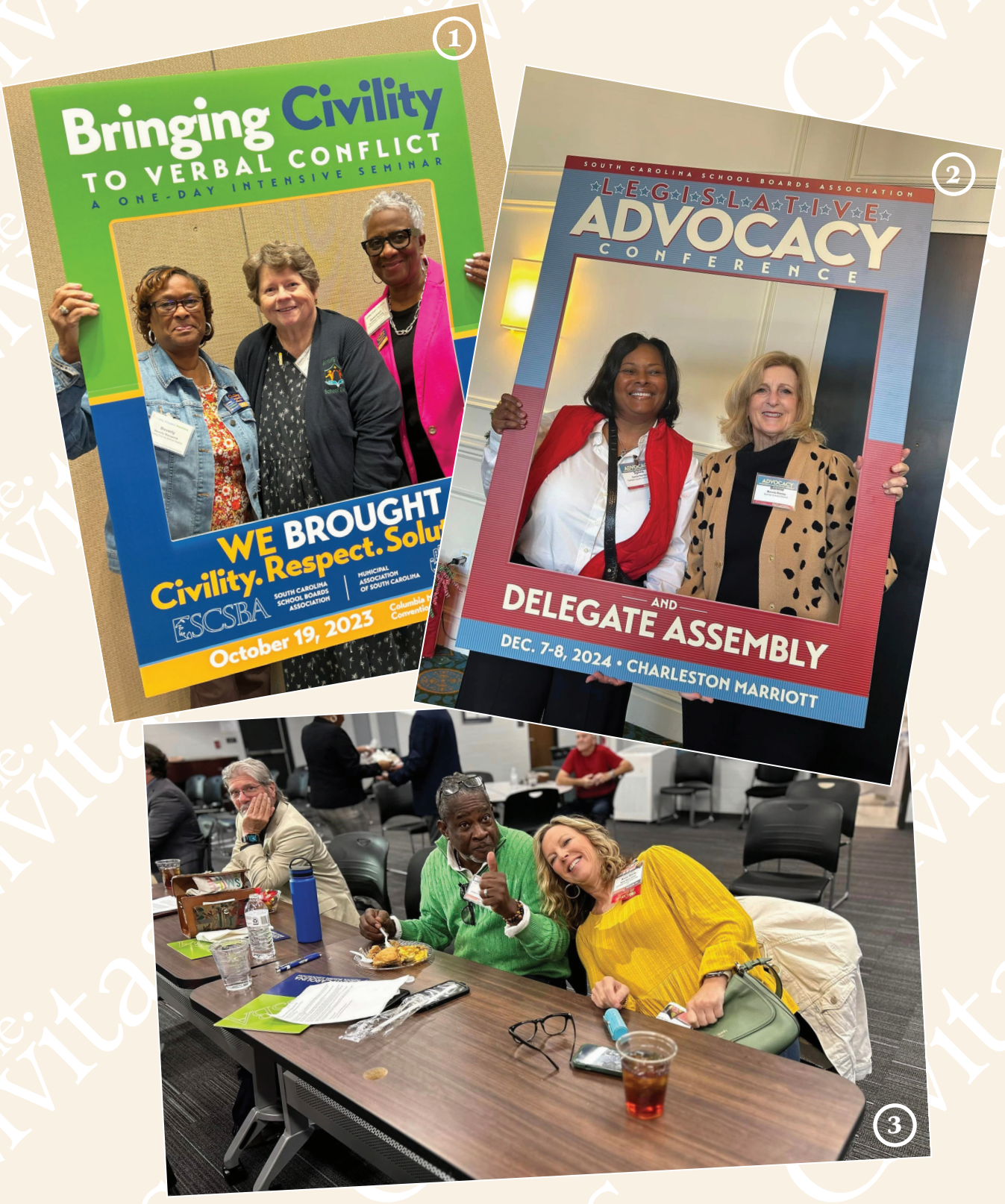


Photo 1: *(from left) May 2023 Civility Ambassador Beverly Bonaparte, board secretary Cindy Hurst and Gwendolyn D. Bamberg, all of Bamberg County School District* • **Photo 2:** *September 2023 Civility Ambassador and board vice chair Sylvia Harrison of Fairfield County School District (left) with Sumter School District board member Bonnie Disney, Esq.* • **Photo 3:** *November 2023 Civility Ambassador Tedd Moyd (center) with Lexington 1 board member Anne Marie Green*

David Flowers: A life of service to community and country

Don't confuse the quiet deportment of Marlboro County School District's (MCSD) Board Secretary David Flowers with an inability to engage his community. With his service on city council; as chaplain for the local Sheriff's Department and the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team; in the S.C. Army National Guard (SCANG) for more than 20 years, which included three deployments; and as an emergency medical technician (EMT) of more than 40 years, he has proven nothing can be further from true.

The Marlboro County native began volunteering with his local rescue squad in Feb. 1980, while working at J.P. Stevens textile company.

"I love community work and helping others," said Flowers, whose life motto is, "Let my light shine, not from talking it but from walking it – to serve others."

"I love community work and helping others. Let my light shine, not from talking it but from walking it – to serve others."

The power of Flowers' example had such a lasting impact on the former sheriff who happened to be a member of the same SCANG unit, he asked if Flowers would serve as chaplain of the Marlboro County Sheriff's Department.

"I attended the International Police Chaplain Course and (I) guess the rest is history," Flowers said.

One service led to another, and Flowers also became a chaplain for the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team.

"I have always respected Billy Graham and applied to help, having deployment experience and (as) a paramedic, figured I would give it a try," he said.

For many years, Flowers was able to juggle 60- and 70-hour work weeks and all his other activities, but one life-altering experience caused him to slow things down, at least for a while.

Upon retiring from the SCANG, Flowers completed



training to become a paramedic. His son, Erick, joined him in the profession.

"I enjoyed being a paramedic, but I really enjoyed doing it with him (Erick)," said Flowers.

Flowers left the house one day for about an hour and returned home to find his son unresponsive.

"At 41 years old, he'd had a cardiac event," said Flowers, who soon after retired from the profession. "(The hours are) for a young man, plus the passing of Erick."

He worked as a paramedic for Marlboro County as well as a field supervisor for Emergency Management Services and as a critical care paramedic for Cape Fear Valley Medical Center before diving fully into volunteer services in the county.

He was encouraged by those in his community to serve on city council and the school board. From both he has gleaned basically the same thing – it's a

lot of give and take.

"You have only one vote and to get things accomplished and sometimes you got to give," Flowers said. "The community needs to see unity."

Flowers, who is raising two of his grandchildren, said he and his wife, Tammy, have learned a great deal about compromise and understanding.

"Raising children in the 1980s was way different than in 2024," said Flowers. "One of the biggest (differences) is they don't play outside, ride bikes and do things outside. It's all about the gaming devices as I call them."

Tammy is a teacher assistant in MCSD and has been for more than 20 years.

RETURN TO TOC

MARCH 2024 CIVILITY AMBASSADOR

Dr. Kathy Coleman: A life of Agriculture + Advocacy = Impact

The word which best describes the service of the chairperson of Saluda County Schools Board of Trustees is enduring. Whether it's her more than 25 years on the local school board, her 13 years on the South Carolina School Boards Association's (SCSBA) board or her 38 years of employment with Clemson University, when Dr. Kathy Coleman serves, she is typically in it for the long haul.

Coleman first earned two degrees from Clemson University – a bachelor's in animal science and a master's in agricultural economics – before earning a Ph.D. in agricultural economics from Texas A&M University.

"No one ever grows up to be a lobbyist. I was constantly trying to decide what I wanted to do."

"I've always been interested in agriculture and that was my first love," said Coleman, who is a first-generation college graduate.

While on a break from school at Texas A&M, Coleman met the lobbyist for Clemson University who would be instrumental in steering her back to Clemson.

"No one ever grows up to be a lobbyist. I was constantly trying to decide what I wanted to do," said Coleman. "He (Clemson University lobbyist) said, 'Why don't you come work for me?'"

It was Coleman's determination to do the work



which would bring about the best outcomes for the most people.

"I figured I could probably do more good by doing that (lobbying), so I decided to do it and have been doing it ever since," said Coleman.

The one hour and 15 minutes it takes to get from her farm in Saluda to her job gives Coleman time to

gather her thoughts regarding the many tasks for the day.

From budgeting and research to agribusiness and irrigation, there are no two days alike at Clemson's 600-acre Sandhill Research and Education Center (REC), according to Coleman. Additionally, during the legislative session, a bulk of Coleman's time is devoted to the State House.

The day-to-day lobbying on behalf of Clemson University has yielded great benefit to Coleman.

"When I think about some of the (research) projects that I've worked on and how they have affected students and South Carolina overall, (it's) amazing (what) our folks at Clemson have done for South Carolina. That's the rewarding part," said Coleman. "(When) you get funding for some project like Call Me Mister, and it took off and, you know, that's like a very rewarding part of my career."

Coleman cited the 250-acre Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (ICAR) campus in Greenville; the ClemsonLIFE ™ program, which offers a collegiate experience that prepares young men and women with intellectual disabilities for employment and independent living; the Clemson Precision Agriculture program located in Blackville, S.C. designed to improve agricultural production sustainability; and the various innovation centers as projects well worth the investment.

Both at work and at home in her leisure time, Coleman has found farming and agriculture to be therapeutic, particularly after losing one of her two sons and her husband only a few years apart.

"I had a rough couple of years," said Coleman. "(It's) part of God's plan. I will see them again one day."

These days she and her son Lewis, daughter-in-law Rachel and grandson Weyman spend as much time together as possible.

As a school board member, as director of Clemson's Sandhill REC and as a farmer, Coleman said her foremost desire is to, "try to be aware of what God's plan is and try to do my best not to mess that up."

RETURN TO TOC

"If people would just understand that if we all just could get along a little bit better, life would be a whole lot easier."

John Galloway
August 2023 Civility Ambassador
Florence School District One

Catrena Hughes-Parker: A fountain of wisdom

Blackville, S.C., a town of a little more than one thousand residents, has earned national acclaim as the home of Healing Springs, a natural water source believed to be a fountain of health and healing.

Born and reared within a town mostly comprised of her relatives, lives Catrena Hughes-Parker, the District 6 representative on the Barnwell County Consolidated School District Board of Trustees. Hughes-Parker is on the mend from two knee replacements which ended her extensive career as a law enforcement officer and as a soldier in the U.S. Army, where she served in the Gulf War's Operation Desert Storm. Though she wanted to continue working, the timing of her injury-induced early retirement turned out to be of benefit, according to Hughes-Parker.

"COVID came a few years later," she said. "It (early retirement) offered me the opportunity to be home with my child at a time when they were doing homeschooling."

"You just have to give everybody respect. I've never had an issue."

The time off since has given Hughes-Parker occasion to reflect on how her education and career paths paved the way for her service on the school board.

After graduating from Blackville-Hilda High School, Hughes-Parker enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves and was soon after deployed to the Persian Gulf. Upon her return to the states, she enrolled at S.C. State University and majored in criminal justice. After graduation, she worked for the S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) as a corrections officer, as a deputy with the Orangeburg County Sheriff's Office and as a canine officer (explosives and drug dog handler) for Centerra at Savannah River Site until her retirement.

"The camaraderie dealing with law enforcement – you actually get close with them because you know these (are) people you might need to call for your backup," said Hughes-Parker. "So, it's like a family. It was different so I enjoyed it."

She said one of the keys to her long-term, successful career in law enforcement is found in one word – respect.

"You just have to give everybody respect," said



Hughes-Parker. "I've never had an issue."

Hughes-Parker knew, unlike school board service, if she wanted to make a positive impact as a law enforcement officer, she couldn't do it in Blackville.

"I told myself I didn't want to work in the town I grew up in because I knew it would be hard for me to do my job," she said.

By the time she completed her vast military service abroad and domestically, Hughes-Parker had earned the rank of Captain.

Though her military career ended, the relationships fostered over the years have remained.

"You go many places," she said. "You meet a lot of people, and they become lifetime friends."

Her natural inclination toward coalition and consensus building is serving Hughes-Parker in her first term on the school board. She ran on the platform of being a bridge and voice of reason.

She and her husband, Anthony, have a daughter enrolled in the district and two sons attending college. This daughter of a Baptist preacher and

a public education support staff worker, said in all of her doing in law enforcement, with her family, in education and in the military, the goal is and has always been to exercise her faith and treat people fair.

"In everything you do, you have to think about (if) it is right or wrong," she said. "If you have a conscience, I don't think you can treat somebody badly and then go home, and it not bother you."

RETURN TO TOC

Union's Manning Jeter: Daughter's Little Light Lives On

Marisha, the daughter of Manning Jeter, Union County Schools Board of Trustees chair, would have turned 33 years old this week (April 29, 2024). The anniversary of her birth serves as a reminder of the tragedy of her death and the light of it, as 16 young ladies have been recipients of the Marisha Sharay Jeter Scholarship established in her honor.



Union County Schools Board of Trustees chair Manning Jeter (right) with his wife, Maretta, hold a portrait of their late daughter, Marisha. Their son, T.J., is with them.

Ironically enough, at the age of 16, Marisha's life ended and, almost immediately, her parents (Manning and Maretta) set out to establish a fund to help secure the future of teens like their daughter – on track to becoming.

Marisha was not only scholarly at school, but she was also a cheerleader, served on the marching band, the yearbook staff, the Winter Guard and was a member of the National Honor Society, Beta Club and Quill and Scroll Society. At church, she served as a junior usher, secretary of her Sunday School class and sang in the youth choir, leading her first solo, "This Little Light of Mine", at the age of two. The memory of her voice and her love of school and life in general, along with the establishment of the scholarship have provided some consolation to the family, according to Manning.

"We wanted to do something to help young ladies who were good in school," said Manning. "Marisha loved school, and she was very high in academics and ran at her own pace. This was a way to try to keep her name alive as well as help other young ladies like her every year."

The recipients of the scholarship have gone on to become doctors, teachers, pharmacists, nurses and more. In fact, most of them have become family, even assisting Maretta through her recent bout with cancer. Since their daughter's death, both Manning and Maretta have battled cancer without missing one fundraising event regarding the scholarship, said Manning, who beat cancer in 2018.

The weight of the tragedies has rightly informed Manning's 24 years of service on the school board.

"(People have) no clue what it does to me when I feel like a child is not getting what they need to be successful," he said.

The family is full of educators, with Maretta owning a childcare center prior to Marisha's death and their son T.J. currently working as a behavior and reading interventionist. The couple have two other older children – Andre' and Rahim.

Rahim and his father run Jeter's Collision Repair, a shop Manning began operating in the early '80s and maintained while working as a senior claims adjuster for Allstate from 2000 to 2016. As a businessperson, Manning had the flexibility to travel the world as a professional musician, performing with such greats as Dazz, Con Funk Shun, The Soul Children, Mandrill, Brick, Mother's Finest, Toy Factory, Tyrone Davis, Zapp, Marshall Tucker and other bands.

"We wanted to do something to help young ladies who were good in school."

"I'm a percussionist and lead vocalist," said Manning. "I'm the one that taught my children."

Marisha and T.J. followed in Manning's footsteps with a love of music. Today, T.J. sings and plays lead guitar, piano and drums throughout the nation, in honor of his sister's life and light.

RETURN TO TOC



Photo 1: *March 2025 Civility Ambassador Sharon Witkin (right) with Marion County School District board member Patricia Atkinson* • **Photo 2:** *(from left) Board chair Michael Coachman and February 2024 Civility Ambassador David Flowers of Marlboro County School District*

Dr. "Tina" Gwozdz and a genealogy to live by

There is a maxim of medicine which states, "Before you examine the body of a patient, be patient to learn their story." In the case of Beaufort County School District's Board of Trustees Chair Christina S. Gwozdz, M.D., it is a story of a third and soon to be fourth generation of family members working to restore, enhance and prolong the lives of others.



Once upon a time, Harold, M.D. and Elise Brecker Williams (a 1918 graduate of Boston University) begat Anne Williams Van Lonkhuyzen, J.D., who married Maurice Van Lonkhuyzen, M.D., who begat two doctors and two attorneys, one of whom was Christina "Tina" Gwozdz, M.D., who married Glenn Gwozdz, M.D.

From this union came Andrew, Will and Thomas, all of whom graduated from Bluffton High School before earning engineering degrees from Princeton University. Will is now enrolled in medical school.

Dr. Gwozdz hails from a long line of physicians, including general practitioners and an ophthalmologist, while she and her husband serve as an otolaryngologist and a gastroenterologist, respectively. There are also quite a few attorneys in the mix.

"My family, my parents and my grandparents really stressed the importance of education and choosing a profession," said Dr. Gwozdz. "I was raised to value high-quality education, and I decided at a young age that I wanted to be a physician."

"My family, my parents and my grandparents really stressed the importance of education and choosing a profession. I was raised to value high-quality education, and I decided at a young age that I wanted to be a physician."

Riding along with her grandfather on house calls when he was the physician for mill workers in Whitinsville, Mass., further solidified her aspirations, which ultimately led her to Cornell University Medical College. Dr. Gwozdz and her husband met as classmates in medical school and relocated to Hilton Head Island after their nuptials.

"We decided to move South and have been in Hilton Head (since) 1989, after we finished our respective training programs," said Dr. Gwozdz. "Job opportunity is really why we came here. I went out on my own – solo practice – and he joined a fellow in his specialty."

For the past 35 years, from 7:30 a.m. until 3 p.m., Gwozdz's office has served countless patients who live as far away as Florida and Georgia and those who are just a stone's throw away.

Gwozdz, whose 97-year-old mother lives with her, said just as she enjoys caring for her mother, she enjoys caring for her tenured patients.

"A lot of patients have stayed with me for decades and I still see them as patients," she said. "Now, I am operating on the next generation or even the grandchildren of somebody I treated in the past."

Things have come full circle for Dr. Gwozdz in practice and within her family.

"When I was raising my boys, I decided to open my office earlier in the day and close it earlier in the afternoon to avoid the typical commuting hours,

allowing me to be home in the afternoon with my kids," said Dr. Gwozdz.

Her husband made similar concessions for the sake of the family and the dividends have paid off.

"We (she and her husband) kind of balanced it (the responsibilities) out a little bit," said Gwozdz. "We were very encouraged to get a fine education. We instilled that in our boys and hopefully, they will instill it in their children."

The couple is expecting their first grandchild this summer.

Dr. Gwozdz credits her service as a physician with shaping who she is as a school board member and having influenced who she is in her personal life.

"Interacting with all walks of life has made (me better) as a school board member and now chair for a number of years. It is good preparation," she said. "As a physician, you have to be professional, ethical, courteous and respectful."

RETURN TO TOC

GCSD's Gaskins: The Mill Village, The School House and The Helping Hands

Clinton, S.C. natives, including Georgetown County School District (GCSD) Board Chair William "Bill" Gaskins, pronounce the name of the town "Klin-non." The "t" remained silent until Gaskins made his way to the College of Charleston where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Upon graduation, Gaskins returned to the textile mill in Clinton, where he was employed for five years. Having been reared in a mill village, Gaskins found it to be the best place for helping him determine the next steps.

"I have a big heart for every student, staff member, teacher and administrator."

"It was a tough time to find a job, so I chose the path of working a mill. I was trained to manage a supply room," said Gaskins. "I worked the second shift.

"After about two years, I started substituting in Laurens District 56. In (those) years, I discovered my calling."

Gaskins immediately enrolled in Converse College, where he earned a master's in elementary education, a teaching certificate and met his wife of now 35 years. He got his start in teaching in Spartanburg and Greenwood counties. His first teaching job in GCSD was at Rosemary Middle School. He invested eight years teaching sixth grade



English/Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies and as a reading interventionist before another 8-year stint teaching fourth and fifth grade. Gaskins also worked as a technology coach at Carvers Bay Middle School.

"Having this experience has helped me with (the) decision-making our district faces," said Gaskins. "I have a big heart for every student, staff member, teacher and administrator. All staff members have a special role in making sure our students have a great Pre-K through 12 experience.

"Our focus has to center around the student."

By the time he became employed in Berkeley

County School District (BCSD), Gaskins could be found wearing many hats. He began working there as a Teaching American History grant facilitator and was then promoted to ELA coordinator. He became known for his technological skills, which led to yet another promotion.

"With my tech and literacy background, I led a virtual learning initiative for the district," said Gaskins. "Before retiring in 2018, I developed a virtual learning program for high school students that included homebound instruction, make-up credits (and) students who transfer in from other states or countries."

In 2015, Gaskins joined the board of directors for Helping Hands of Georgetown County, Inc. After retirement from BCSD, he became an active volunteer with Helping Hands. In 2019, Gaskins was named the assistant director, where his responsibilities included the day-to-day operations of the food pantry, dental clinic, job program and youth empowerment program.

"So many of the clients I encountered have lost hope and the ability to dream (of) a better life," he said. "Many got to this place with circumstances that they were not able to control. I have always seen myself as a person who tries to instill hope in others, to provide help with the circumstances they live in and provide ways for change."

In 2020, he was elected to the GCSD board. In his work as a school and non-profit board member, employee and as a volunteer at the Caring and Sharing Food Pantry in Hemingway, S.C., Gaskins intimates God has always been at the center.

"My strong Christian beliefs have taught me to live a life with a servant's heart," said Gaskins. "I believe in servant leadership. God has been so good to me and blessed me in so many ways that I am constantly looking for ways to give back and be a servant to others."

For the past few years, Gaskins has served on a committee to bring Teach My People, a Christ-centered, academically focused afterschool and summer program, to Andrews Elementary School.

Gaskins and his wife, Martha Lynn, have two children – William C. Gaskins Jr., a corporate tax attorney in Durham, N.C. and Anna Riley Gaskins, a 2022 Clemson University graduate who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in nursing at the Medical University of South Carolina.

RETURN TO TOC

From contentious school board meetings to personal attacks on social media, the idea of keeping things civil in local government has grown more difficult over the years. For that reason, the South Carolina School Boards Association identified promoting civility in school board governance as a top priority for the Association's ongoing work.

SCSBA's website now offers a variety of civility resources for school boards to use, which emphasize the importance of civil behavior for everyone present.

Chesterfield's Dr. Darin Coleman: A Marriage of Professions

The full measure of who Dr. Darin Coleman is could never be described without expressing his educational values and love for mankind, as is evidenced by the varied positions he holds within his community.

For nearly 15 years, Coleman has served on the Chesterfield County School District Board of Trustees, where he is now vice chairman. As district 2 representative, Coleman's coverage includes Petersburg Primary, Pageland and Jefferson Elementary, New Heights Middle and Central High schools.

During the same 15-year span, he has risen through the ranks at Northeastern Technical College from director of Student Support Services to Student Services manager and now dean of Student Engagement. Since November of 1996, he has served as pastor and is now the senior pastor of New Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church in Fayetteville, N.C., during which time he and his family also founded Charity Community Church of Christ in Cheraw, S.C.

"My goal is to work in education and community by using my knowledge and expertise to help people succeed."

His wholistic approach to life and his assignments has led Coleman to his most rewarding achievements.

"My goal is to work in education and community by using my knowledge and expertise to help people succeed," said Coleman. "I continue to work hard to develop leadership skills in communication, sound judgment, delegation and interacting with people to motivate their potential to excel in life."

To that end, Coleman recently earned a doctorate in ministerial leadership from Columbia International University (CIU). He also holds a master's degree in theological studies and organizational leadership from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a bachelor's in sociology from Coker University.

The term "It just so happened…" is likely the best way to describe the road to his profession and service to students from kindergarten through college.



"I never thought of this in any way early on. I am a first-generation college student," said Coleman. "However, I believe it was divinely orchestrated by God that set me on this journey, and when I reflect upon both, they intersected when I started my career in higher education (in) 2009 and was elected to the school board (in) 2010."

Coleman supervises student life at four of Northeastern Technical College's campuses – Bennettsville, Cheraw, Dillon and Pageland.

His responsibilities include assisting students with admissions and financial aid; creating programs to enhance student life; and handling disciplinary issues.

"I was given opportunity to work on a temporary grant to mentor African American males, (which) turned into a full-time (position)," said Coleman.

As for his role as a minister, Coleman's recollection is much like others who serve as senior pastors.

"I was made aware in 1993 and accepted this call in 1994 at St. James A.M.E. Zion Church, in Chesterfield, S.C.," said Coleman, who calls his journey in every realm amazing and full of challenges and rewards. "When I look back, 'if it had not been for the Lord on my side,' none of this would have been possible. So, I see myself as a minister of education."

His education ministry of great height and depth in the community also permeates the home of him and his wife of 34 years, Amy.

"My wife and I made it our goal to make college a reality for our children," said Coleman. "Now, all five of us have master's degrees and I complete(d) my doctorate in May 2024."

Whether in the board room, on the college campus, the pulpit or at home, Coleman counts himself fortunate to mentor students, serve constituents and guide and guard his family and the flock.

"I am always concerned about being an advocate for people to have access to better themselves," Coleman said. "As a leader in the church and community, it has afforded me the privilege to use my leadership (skills) as a member and vice chair of my local school board."

RETURN TO TOC

SEPTEMBER 2024 CIVILITY AMBASSADOR

Anderson's Grate: Generations of nursing a community

One might think with 12 years of school board experience, the Vice Chairperson of the Anderson School District Four Board of Trustees, Paulette Grate, would be most known for her service in education. Though she is a well-respected educator, it is nursing which makes "Grate" a household name.

The now retired Grate knew from as early as age 12 she wanted to help people. For better than 44 years, she did so, either as a director of nursing for a long-term care facility, a nursing instructor for the local technical college, a nurse consultant or just at the request of those in the Pendleton area where she was born and reared.

"I wanted to care for people. I used to care for my grandmother," said Grate. "She was diabetic, so she was on insulin, and I would help care for her and give her insulin."

Grate's service became even more widespread as her passion for the profession grew.

"Then, there were other older ladies in our church that would need help, and I would go help clean their homes and go to the grocery store with them, whatever they needed," said Grate.

In 1978, Grate earned her nursing degree from Clemson University and from there, whether at home or at work, she slowly became the community's on-call nurse.



"If anybody got sick in the middle of the night because we're out in the rural area, they would pick up the phone and call me," she said. "They knew they could pick up the phone anytime, day or night. I always left clothes out at night so if anybody in the community got sick, I can get there before the rescue squad."

"Then, there were other older ladies in our church that would need help, and I would go help clean their homes and go to the grocery store with them, whatever they needed."

These and other experiences are a constant reminder of her purpose in life, said Grate.

"I had a good friend from high school that had Crohn's disease, and she was always in and out of the hospital. I helped care for her," she said.

Grate, after working a full shift, would go to the hospital to sit with her friend.

"We're still good friends and that's been 50 years ago," she said.

Grate also recalls an incident early in her career involving her then, 20-year-old niece who suffered from lupus.

"She started having seizures right in the middle of the storm and I had to get with her dad and get her to the emergency room, which was about 15, 16 miles away. It took over an hour to go about 15 miles," Grate said. "That one made me know that this was where I needed to be within caring for people."

The incident not only helped solidify Grate's desire to serve, but her daughter was so inspired, she serves as a nurse today. Grate even has a granddaughter who earned a degree in healthcare management from Lander University.

In many regards, Grate has not fully retired. Her work continues at the church where her family has held a membership for at least four generations – New Holly Light Missionary Baptist Church.

Grate is the administrative assistant to pastor and is even working to produce a new crop of nurses through the health ministry she founded at the church in 1980.

"Now, we have 10 RNs (registered nurses), probably 10 or 12 sitters (and) 35 medical assistants and EKG (electrocardiogram) technicians," said Grate.

As for the future, Grate, her husband David, their four daughters and eight grandchildren plan to continue a legacy of caring for others at home, through the church or wherever else they are called upon to serve.

RETURN TO TOC

"The importance of a good education and the doors it can open for children motivated me to run. My hope was to help make decisions that would allow our children to succeed."

Dr. Julia Mims
May 2026 Civility Ambassador
Florence School District Three

Aiken's Dr. John Bradley: It Took a Village

The notion of teacher villages, widely embraced by the education community in recent years, is a familiar concept to Dr. John Bradley, the newly elected vice-chairman of the Aiken County School District Board of Trustees, who lived in a teacherage during some of his formative years.

Between the ages of four and eight, his mother, a first and second grade public school teacher, taught in neighboring counties. Since daycare did not exist, school officials suggested his mother allow him to sit in her classroom as she taught.

"(I) was treated as if I was a student," said Dr. Bradley. "My mother and I lived in a building with other teachers during the week and returned home on the weekend."

"I had a front row seat to the transition of southern rural children … to a broader, richer, more exciting world and the beginning of an education that would expand our worlds and give us the tools necessary to negotiate that world."

He credits these experiences with establishing his belief in the importance of public education.

"I had a front row seat to the transition of southern rural children from persons who knew only that provided by their early experience on farms to a broader, richer, more exciting world and the beginning of an education that would expand our worlds and give us the tools necessary to negotiate that world," Dr. Bradley said.

The psychologist never veered far from his humble beginnings in the lower part of Richland County as the only child of a public school teacher and a father who worked as a prison guard and administrator, eventually graduating from Eau Claire High School in Richland School District One (Richland One).

His father would give him second-hand accounts of his adventures in the brutal prison world and the biographies of some of the most notable criminals.



"This, I believe, was the genesis of my interest in understanding human behavior and its variations," said Dr. Bradley.

Having often been the youngest in his class gave rise to Dr. Bradley's desire to better understand the behavior of his older classmates.

"I frequently was not mature enough to understand why they did what they did, so I became a keen observer of the human experience in order to learn how to fit in," he said.

His observations coupled with the efforts of a science teacher who helped him navigate his transition from rural South Carolina to the city school proved beneficial to Dr. Bradley.

"She taught me in a way that gave me confidence in myself and showed me how much a teacher can mean to a student trying to get a foothold in life," he said. "Although she taught me science classes in high school, she was one of the best psychologists I have ever known."

Dr. Bradley earned a bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. in psychology from the University of South Carolina. While working on his doctorate, Dr. Bradley worked at the South Carolina State Hospital for four years and the South Carolina Department of Corrections for one year before working as a school psychologist in Richland One.

"I saw working in schools was a better way to help people – identify the problem early and bring resources to bear before the problem became deep-rooted," said Dr. Bradley.

He and his wife, Sally, (a former public school English teacher) eventually moved to Aiken where he was employed as the director of Special Programs, serving in various capacities as an assistant superintendent for the school district before retiring in 1990. He also worked as an adjunct professor for the University of South Carolina – Aiken.

A few years into retirement, Dr. Bradley ran for the school board and served 16 consecutive years, 13 of which he served as chairman. During this time, Dr. Bradley was working as the clinical psychologist in the Savannah River Site's medical department, a position he held for 21 years in conjunction with a private practice.

Dr. Bradley left the board for 11 years before returning in 2019.

"(I) missed it. Following some problems that led to three of the board's members resigning before their terms ended, I decided to run again and was elected," said Dr. Bradley. "Being involved in education has become a way of life for me and I never want to quit, even though I know the time will come."

Just as he followed in his parent's footsteps, the Bradley's only son, Dr. J. Michael Bradley, who is a product of Aiken County School District, is a practicing clinical psychologist in New Orleans and is married to a commercial photographer.

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Photo 1: *May 2024 Civility Ambassador Manning Jeter (left) with SCSBA Executive Director Scott Price*
Photo 2: *March 2025 Civility Ambassador Sharon Witkin (right) with fellow board member of Colleton County School District Lynn Stroble and Walterboro Mayor James Broderick*

Laurens 55's Tabitha Keitt and a family rooted and grounded

Hailing from the small town of Gray Court in northern Laurens County, Tabitha Keitt is now the Seat 1 representative on the Laurens School District 55 Board of Trustees, the very area and district where she was born and raised.

Keitt, who never really left the county, except to attend college, said her family is deeply rooted in Laurens.

"My parents, Tommy and Tina Crowder, were also born and raised in Laurens County. They raised my brother, Todd Crowder, and I (here)," she said. "We are all graduates of Laurens District 55 High School along with many other members of my family over the past years."

"I get to be a part of hopefully many different successful changes, improvements or creations of ways to improve the safety and learning of children and youth in education and faith."

Upon graduating from high school, Keitt's higher education pursuits took her from Greenville Technical College to Lander University and then to the University of South Carolina Upstate to obtain a nursing degree, where Keitt faced one of the grimmest times in her life.

"In November of 2006, I had just begun my last year of nursing school when I had a motor vehicle accident that resulted in a spinal cord injury (which) caused me to be paralyzed from the chest down," said Keitt. "I went through many struggles, emotions and physical therapies during my recovery. I would not have made it through without the support and love from my family, church and friends."

After extensive recovery, Keitt went on to earn a bachelor's degree in human service management in 2011, about the same time she and her husband Carson, also a graduate of Laurens 55, found out they would soon become parents.



"I knew I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom and did not pursue (a) career in my area of study at that time," she said.

Keitt describes being a stay-at-home mom as being the most rewarding part of her life, citing her angst with having to see daughter, Leila, start school.

"From birth to school age, we were able to play and learn together everyday," said Keitt. "Starting school was hard on both of us. I think we both cried every morning for a week.

Keitt said being a parent with a child in the school district allows her to relate to what other parents are going through when it comes to frustrations and successes with the school system.

It wasn't long after enrolling Leila in Laurens 55 schools that Keitt began volunteering at the church she's attended her entire life – Bramlett Methodist Church in Gray Court. One conversation with the pastor resulted in her becoming the director of the Children's Ministry while also serving as treasurer.

She was immediately charged with creating a new Children's Program, which has experienced exponential growth.

"At the time, we only had two children, but we have grown since, and have about 20 today," said Keitt. "I have truly enjoyed being part of the Children's Department over the last five years."

With the coming of the new year, Keitt will assist her sister-in-law, who is a Laurens 55 special education teacher, in the Youth Department at church. Keitt said her previous work in ministry has aptly prepared her to assist with the youth there and as a school board member.

"I get to be a part of hopefully many different successful changes, improvements or creations of ways to improve the safety and learning of children and youth in education and faith," said Keitt.

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DECEMBER 2024 CIVILITY AMBASSADOR

Lee County's Queenie Boyd: A legacy of good and grace

One longtime member of the Lee County School District's Board of Trustees most often answers to "mama" in education circles and among her fellow school board members throughout the state. The most accurate description of her might be her first name – Queenie.

For the past 36 years, Queenie M. Boyd has served her local school board with stately distinction as both chairperson and vice chairperson. Boyd served so well, she was elected Region 6 Director on the South Carolina School Boards Association's (SCSBA) Board of Directors in 2006, representing Chesterfield, Darlington, Kershaw, Lee and Marlboro counties.

"Your whole heart has to be in it. I've got to speak for these children. I've got to make sure that parents understand … (we are) advocates."

She entered the executive board rotation some time later and became president of the Association in 2017.

"It (serving on the state board) gave me a little more knowledge about what boards are to be throughout," said Boyd. "So many times on the local board, we think it's just this, but when you have the opportunity to go from one board status to another board status and even to national, it (is) a plus to me."



Boyd said she always brought back nuggets of board governance strategies to share with her local board, many of which they still employ today.

The stimulus of her service as a school board member and her lifetime commitment to every sector of her place of residence, Lee County, has perhaps been her God-first mantra. Reared by her great-grandparents in the same place where she now serves, Boyd says her passion for community organizing and engagement originates from home. Growing up on the farm was void of much, said Boyd, but there was one thing which was ever present, without a doubt – love.

"Being raised by them as great-grandparents, the expectation was that you're going to do good, You've got to do good," said Boyd.

Doing good to her great-grandparents meant making a positive impact on the well-being of the citizenry by showing forth love and respect for all people, said Boyd.

An employee of REXAM Beverage Cans for 34 years, an accomplished coalition-builder and community leader in Lee County, Boyd has worked to bridge gaps between the education, faith and government sectors for decades. It is common for education meetings to be held at Liberty Hill Missionary Baptist Church where she is a member, or at any other church with which she is closely connected within the county. It is also common to find the faith-based community volunteering in the educational system and in government, oftentimes at the request of Boyd.

"Your whole heart has to be in it," said Boyd of her board and community service. "I've got to speak for these children. I've got to make sure that parents understand … (we are) advocates."

A self-avowed bashful person, Boyd says she is naturally quiet and a contemplative listener.

"I can open up, but if you notice at board meetings, I don't say a lot because I am taking in and learning," Boyd said. "But, you have a right and are supposed to ask questions."

The question she is being asked most these days is why she has decided not to run for re-election. After 36 years, Boyd's service ended in November, while her legacy lives on in her community and leaps forth through her offspring.

She and her husband, Alexander, who served on city council and as mayor of Bishopville for nearly a decade have four children – one is a principal, one an engineer, one is in business and the other is a pharmacist.

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"Of all the elected capacities, it is often said being a school board member is the toughest and sometimes the most thankless. Additionally, decisions sometimes must be made which can be life-changing for those involved."

Dr. Charles King
April 2026 Civility Ambassador
Kershaw County School District



Photo 1: *(from left) Lynne Ford and July 2024 Civility Ambassador William "Bill" Gaskins, both of Georgetown County School District* • **Photo 2:** *(from left) SCSBA Region 2 Director and Charleston County School District board member Darlene Dunmeyer-Roberson and fellow board member Dr. Carol Tempel* • **Photo 3:** *(from left) April 2026 Civility Ambassador Dr. Charles King with Ben Connell, Chairman of the Kershaw County Council*

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CIVILITY AMBASSADORS

#civilityambassadors

Swansea's Sutton: The Builder from Happytown

Lexington School District Four Board of Trustees Chairman Quincy Sutton is a builder. He's a builder of consensus, of congregants, family and community. From his roots in Happytown in Gaston, S.C. to his home in Swansea, S.C. Sutton is known for forming, developing and nurturing the people and things around him, both figuratively and literally. His more than five-year service on the school board has been no different.

"I felt that if I was going to live and raise a family in this community that I had to be 'All In'. So, I'm committed to making sure that not only our children, but all Lexington Four children have the best education and experience that we can afford them," said Sutton.

"I love being from the Swansea/Gaston area. There is no place like home and that is why I'm fully committed to the betterment of my area."

I plan to run and be a part of our school board as long as I'm able to serve."

He attributes their board's collegiality and cohesiveness to their ability to "agree to disagree" with grace.

"I believe that a unified front is important when serving as a board member," said Sutton, who likens board service to family dynamics. "There are things that my wife and I may see differently, but when we speak to our children, we present it with unity and togetherness. We work the details out on our own time behind closed doors."

Sutton said his family has resided in the greater Lexington County area for more than a century.

"I love being from the Swansea/Gaston area. There is no place like home and that is why I'm fully committed to the betterment of my area," he said.

Sutton is employed as a representative/liaison for the Customer Care Department of the City of Orangeburg's Department of Public Utilities Administrative Division.

"I truly enjoy solving problems and assisting



customers with issues regarding financial indigence," he said. "I also enjoy assisting with families and individuals who are acquiring or building new homes.

"One of the great things about what I do is we are the first to find out about and assist with new businesses and projects that are coming to the Greater Orangeburg area."

In addition to these duties, Sutton is the senior pastor of New Life Ministries in Swansea, S.C., the job qualifications of which he feels closely align with board service.

"Pastoring and being on the school board both require humility, stability, an open mind and a servant's heart," said Sutton. "As our world changes and as our communities grow, we have to be open, accepting and compassionate to those we serve. These characteristics are important as I serve in both capacities."

Sutton is the son of Bishop Cardell and Dr. Carolyn Sutton, who founded the church he pastors in the late 80s. He is a fourth-generation preacher and his

wife, Cassandra, represents the third generation who have followed the ministry path. Sutton said it was very important to marry someone whose values aligned with his.

"Marriage, raising children and life itself present enough challenges," said Sutton. "We believe 'doing life' with someone who holds the same morals, values and standards (makes) things much easier."

One of his most profound undertakings as a builder has been the establishment of his business – Q- Concepts Design & Consultants. He started the company after assisting several families and friends through the process of purchasing or building new homes. Sutton works with contractors and individuals on project design and construction management for new homes and remodels.

As for family, Sutton and his wife of 17 years have three children – Quincy Cardell II, Rachel Caroline and Elva Queenslei. Cassandra is employed by Lexington Four.

RETURN TO TOC

Colleton's Sharon Witkin: An "All-In" Advocate for Public Education

In a world where school board members often work behind the scenes, Sharon Witkin stands out as a committed and proactive advocate for the children of Colleton County. As the secretary of Colleton County School District's Board of Trustees, Witkin plays a vital role in shaping the direction of education in a community that is both geographically expansive and economically diverse.

Witkin's journey to the school board began when she moved back to her hometown of Walterboro with her young children. At first, the stay-at-home mom felt uncertain about her ability to contribute to the community. However, her determination to become more involved led her to join local and regional leadership programs, which ignited her passion for public service.

"I initially felt I had little to offer, but with the encouragement of others, I realized that my background in non-profit work and my educational experiences were a good fit for serving as a school board trustee," Witkin said.

Her role on the school board goes beyond policy decisions; it's about fostering a positive, safe and effective learning environment for students in the district, which spans the entirety of the county. Colleton County is South Carolina's fifth-largest county by land area and houses the 27th-largest population in the state. Within this vast landscape, Witkin represents District 3, which includes Walterboro, the county seat and its largest municipality.



The district serves a student body where 84 percent of students live in poverty. This statistic underscores the importance of the school board's work and, particularly, Witkin's role.

As the secretary, Witkin's responsibilities extend beyond traditional administrative duties. She coordinates monthly board meetings, working closely with the other board officers and the district superintendent to ensure smooth operations. But her position often requires her to step into an unexpected role: that of a past president, offering guidance and perspective, especially during transitions between board officers.

"It's an opportunity to provide continuity and share lessons learned from my previous tenure as chairman," she said.

In recent board meetings, school safety has become a growing concern.

"The core purpose of our school district is teaching and learning, but we must first ensure a safe and positive environment for our students," Witkin said.

"I am an involved parent, and this gives me a direct line to understand what's happening within our schools. Listening to parents, students and teachers helps me advocate for policies that truly benefit the community."

The district has implemented robust safety measures, including weapons detection systems and metal detectors in secondary schools and at school events.

Additionally, the district maintains strong partnerships with local law enforcement, ensuring that school resource officers (SROs) are present at every school. Mental health support is also a priority, with guidance programs and a partnership with Coastal Empire Mental Health providing essential counseling services.

When Witkin is not attending to school board responsibilities, she is deeply involved in her family life. As a stay-at-home mom to two teenage boys, Michael and Sam, her daily schedule consists of carpooling, sports events and volunteering. She serves on various school committees, including the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and the School Improvement Council (SIC) and is an active volunteer with her church and other community organizations.

"I am an involved parent, and this gives me a direct line to understand what's happening within our schools. Listening to parents, students and teachers helps me advocate for policies that truly benefit the community," she said.

Her husband, Spencer, a local dentist and small business owner, is also a staunch supporter of public education. Together, they instill in their children a sense of civic duty and the importance of community involvement, all while navigating the daily challenges of raising teenagers.

One of Witkin's most defining moments as a school board member came when the district faced a critical funding gap. When the state mandated significant salary increases for teachers and certified staff, Colleton County's ability to meet the funding requirements became a political battleground. Witkin was at the forefront of this fight, advocating for an increase in local tax revenue to ensure that teachers and staff would receive the compensation they deserve.

The district's request for increased funds was ultimately denied, forcing the district to dip into its general fund reserve to cover the gap. Despite this setback, Witkin and the board have remained active in raising awareness about the importance of funding local schools. She attends county council meetings and engages with local leaders to ensure the school district is well supported.

For Sharon Witkin, being a school board member isn't just a job—it's a calling. As she continues to balance her roles as a mother, wife, volunteer and advocate, she remains an essential force in shaping the future of Colleton County's schools.

RETURN TO TOC

Edgefield's Dr. Willie Campbell: From Social Worker and Mayor to Pastor and Board Member

Dr. Willie Campbell, a revered community leader and advocate, is said to embody the principles of civility and humility. Born and raised in Johnston, S.C., the Peach Capital of the World, his life story is one of resilience, service and faith. As a prominent figure on the Edgefield County School District Board of Trustees and former mayor of Johnston, Campbell's journey suggests the values he holds dear — respect for others, equality and an unwavering moral compass.

Campbell's perspective on life has been shaped profoundly by his upbringing. Raised by a mother and grandmother who were hardworking women, he learned the importance of respect and honor at an early age. His family instilled in him a strong work ethic and a commitment to treating everyone with dignity — values which would later define his leadership style.

"Growing up, we were taught that you do the job you're asked to do without complaint, and you do it with a smile," Campbell said. "We were raised to respect people, no matter their background or beliefs."

"Growing up, we were taught that you do the job you're asked to do without complaint, and you do it with a smile," Campbell said. "We were raised to respect people, no matter their background or beliefs."

Campbell's childhood was also shaped by the harsh realities of segregation. He recalls a time when Black people had to remain at the bottom steps when visiting white homes and were often followed around in stores. Experiences like these left lasting scars, yet Campbell's response to them has always been one of dignity and restraint.

"Growing up during that time was devastating," he said, but he continues to emphasize the importance of maintaining composure in the face of adversity. His ability to stay composed, even in the most uncomfortable situations, became a defining trait in his later career.



Despite these setbacks, Campbell's commitment to service never wavered. His history-making tenure as Johnston's first African American mayor was not born out of a desire for personal gain but from a genuine need to advocate for all people. Reflecting on his decision to run, he shares his mother once asked him, "Are you running for mayor because you are Black, or are you running for all people?"

"I was running for equality for all people," he said.

Through his work, he sought to lead with humility and faith, facing many challenges with the understanding that prayer and God's guidance would see him through.

Campbell's leadership philosophy is grounded in the belief it is always better to lead with a solid moral

compass and walk with humility. Drawing inspiration from 1 Peter 5:5, he stresses the importance of being humble and submissive to one another.

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble," he said.

For Campbell, this passage reminds him to serve others with compassion and to encourage others to be their best selves, even when faced with personal challenges.

One of Campbell's most enduring roles has been his service on the Edgefield County School District Board of Trustees. Motivated by encouragement from local teachers and the influence he had on students and their families, Campbell is passionate about improving public education and ensuring every child receives the guidance and support they deserve. In his work, he emphasizes the importance of respect, love and genuine care for students. His commitment to fostering a positive and respectful environment for all students stems from the same values he learned as a child.

"We must demonstrate true love and respect for the people we serve," said Dr. Campbell.

Throughout his journey, Campbell's family has been his pillar of support. His wife, children and siblings have stood by him through thick and thin, offering prayers and encouragement along the way.

Today, as the Pastor of Grace Deliverance, Campbell continues to serve his community, bringing people together through faith and understanding. His experience in the Department of Social Services has taught him the importance of empathy and listening, skills he applies in his current work as both a pastor and community leader.

"Hurt people hurt people," he said, "but through love and understanding, we can bring people through their pain."

As Campbell ponders his future, his aspirations remain rooted in community. He hopes to continue raising awareness about the needs of local cities and schools, ensuring children see role models who look like them and who have succeeded against the odds. His vision for the future is one of unity, where people of all backgrounds can come together and achieve remarkable things under God's guidance.

RETURN TO TOC

"To be part of a team working to provide a safe place for students to learn and grow is a wonderful feeling. It extends my love of building and growing."

Debra Holmes
March 2026 Civility Ambassador
Hampton County School District

Dorchester Two's Farnsworth: Principles and Vested Interest

In the heart of Summerville, S.C., there's a business owner whose name is synonymous with trust, leadership and community service – Justin Farnsworth, a member of the Dorchester School District Two Board of Trustees. Not just a leader in business but a devoted advocate for education and a strong proponent of civic engagement, Farnsworth's journey from military service to entrepreneurship is a testament to the power of personal investment in the future of others.

"Public schools are not just about preparing students for college or careers, they're about shaping the future of our society. Everyone benefits from an educated community."

His story begins in a place where few would expect to find entrepreneurial roots – the U.S. Navy. Serving as a nuclear engineer aboard the USS Harry S. Truman, his responsibilities ranged from managing complex nuclear propulsion systems to training the next generation of engineers.

"This experience in the Navy not only shaped my approach to leadership and problem-solving but also instilled a strong sense of discipline and dedication that I have carried into my civilian and business life," said Farnsworth.

He then transitioned into the world of finance, working as a Wealth Advisor and Investment Officer at First Citizens Bank. His experience in financial planning allowed him to see firsthand how important it was for individuals and families to secure their futures.

This led to him owning The Farnsworth Family Agency, an Allstate Insurance affiliate in Summerville, which he opened in Oct. 2020. Under his leadership, the agency quickly became #1 in the state of South Carolina, providing personalized insurance solutions to the community.



Farnsworth's commitment to his customers extends beyond financial transactions; it's about creating peace of mind, ensuring families feel secure enough to live their lives to the fullest.

"Starting a business is about more than just selling a product or service," he said. "It's about creating a legacy and building something that serves the community. A business is a vehicle for making a positive impact."

Farnsworth's dedication to service is not confined to his business. Since 2014, he has served on the Dorchester Two board, where he is an advocate for quality education. As a parent himself, he saw firsthand how crucial it is to provide students with an environment which nurtures their academic and personal growth.

"I believe education is the cornerstone of success," said Farnsworth. "I want to be part of a system which not only prepares our students for the challenges of

tomorrow but helps them grow as individuals with the skills and confidence to succeed."

One of the most significant shifts he has experienced during his time on the board has been the transition to a single-member district system. While it promises more localized representation, it also presents new challenges, particularly around ensuring equitable resource distribution. Farnsworth is committed to navigating these challenges, always with the goal of strengthening the educational experiences of all students in the district.

Farnsworth is also deeply involved in the community, recognizing relationships are the foundation of lasting positive change. Through collaborations with local non-profits and other community organizations, he's helped improve both the well-being of local families and the vitality of Summerville itself.

His wife, Jessica, who serves as the assistant director of Elementary Education for Dorchester Two, also plays a key role in shaping Farnsworth's views on education and leadership.

"Jessica's work provides me with a unique insight into the challenges faced by our schools, especially in terms of curriculum development and staff training," he said.

Her expertise complements his, allowing him to advocate for policies which not only address the needs of students but also support the educators who guide them.

Together, Farnsworth and his wife are raising two children who continue to excel in both academics and extracurriculars. Blake is studying agricultural business at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and Zoe, is a dedicated public high school student recently inducted into the National Honor Society.

In his view, public education is a cornerstone of a thriving family and community.

"Public schools are not just about preparing students for college or careers, they're about shaping the future of our society. Everyone benefits from an educated community," he said.

Even those without children in public schools, he argues, have a vested interest in supporting them, as strong schools contribute to lower crime rates, higher employment and overall economic stability.

RETURN TO TOC

"When I look at what public education in a small town has done for my family, it makes me want to give back and make sure the next generation has even better opportunities."

Christopher Nakia Davis
January 2026 Civility Ambassador
Anderson County Board of Education

Chester's Maggie James: Leadership Lessons from the Heart of Desegregation

Chester County School District (CCSD) Board of Trustees member Maggie James likens her journey through the trauma of desegregation to the lyrics of the gospel classic How I Got Over by Mahalia Jackson, a song which speaks to the struggles and triumphs of the human spirit through faith in God.

What began in the halls of Finley Junior High School for African American students, continued through to the annals of Brockman Junior and Chester Senior high schools nearly 60 years ago, culminating in an integration which helped shape a woman of many firsts. James, the district's longest-serving school board member, was not only the first African American woman to serve on the board, but also the first to become its chair, representing the heart of Chester's community.

"The compassion and genuine outlook I have for all the lives that may have lasting impact by decisions of education that are made are of paramount importance to me."

"The fact that I was able to overcome what I faced and go on to become the chair and vice chair of a school system that once devalued my education makes a profound statement about my determination to never give up," James said.

She speaks candidly about the compassion and sense of responsibility that drive her service.

"The compassion and genuine outlook I have for all the lives that may have lasting impact by decisions of education that are made are of paramount importance to me," she said. "The future educational endeavors of the students in this community are always foremost in my mind."

James looks back in wonder at how her participation in the integration process conditioned her for the ridicule she would endure in public service across more than 30 years.



"The white children would make fun of our facial features—lips, eyes, noses—as well as our skin color and hair," she said.

In June 1965, during the initial stages of integration, CCSD sent a Freedom of Choice application to every Black parent. James' parents completed the form and mailed it back. In August, they received an acceptance letter and an invitation to attend an orientation.

James expected her classmates from Finley to be there, but quickly realized most Black parents had chosen not to send their children to the all-white Brockman Junior High School.

"My parents always ensured that my education was of paramount importance to them as well as my spiritual and social interactions," said James. "The courageous (public) school choice my parents made

that placed me on the front lines of integration was a phenomenal decision for my life and advocacy."

James graduated from Chester Senior High School in 1970 and later earned a diploma in general business management from York Technical College.

She and her husband of 52 years, Robert Sr., have three adult children—Carmen (Anthony), McClinton, Robert K. Jr. (Janine) and Alexander C. (Teresa)—10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Beyond her board service, James worked at the Sears Catalog Store in Chester before spending 34 years in state government at the Chester County Department of Social Services. Fittingly, she held the title "Human Services Specialist."

In a recent article marking the 69th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education, James spoke about the isolation she felt during integration.

"To be treated like you weren't human," she said, recalling days when no one would speak to her. "The only time I saw a few other Black students was during recess or lunchtime."

Those experiences became lessons in leadership.

"If you are a true and effective leader, you cannot isolate yourself from uncomfortable situations," James said. "In leadership, you must posture yourself to exhibit the qualities of the position you've attained."

As for what comes next, James plans to continue standing on the principles which have guided her for nearly three decades: faith, family, service and integrity.

"God has given me the stability and strength to endure—the unwavering love, support and trust of the community I represent," which she said is enough.

RETURN TO TOC

"When we participate — by volunteering, attending events and supporting one another — we don't just lift our own children; we strengthen the entire community."

Angela Clyburn
November 2025 Civility Ambassador
Richland One

Amanda Taylor Faircloth: Serving Where She was Nurtured and Needed

Amanda Taylor Faircloth, vice chairperson of the Dillon School District Four Board of Trustees, hails from Dillon County, South Carolina — best known to passersby for the quirky, roadside attraction South of the Border. But for Faircloth, Dillon is more than a landmark on the I-95 corridor. It's home and the foundation of her life's work in education, banking and service.

Faircloth's reflections on public education are grounded in both personal experience and broader community need. While Dillon County has drawn national attention for its educational funding disparities, Faircloth views her upbringing there with pride and gratitude.

"Dillon school district prepared me well," she said. "We've always had teachers who genuinely care — not just about our grades, but about who we become."

She was raised in the Tall Pines community near Hamer and now lives in Dillon proper. It's a place where deep roots and close relationships form the backbone of everyday life.

"Dillon is a small town where everyone knows everyone, or at least someone in your family," said Faircloth. "It's a community that comes together in times of need."

One of those needs brought Faircloth to the school board in 2019. Her mother, Ethel Taylor, had served on the board for 25 years. When Ethel passed away, the community knew exactly who should continue her legacy.

"I was hesitant at first," Faircloth recalled. "But after praying and talking with my family, I realized what an honor it was, not just to serve, but to carry on her legacy and advocate for the children of Dillon County."

"Always be respectful of others' opinions. But be steadfast in your beliefs and focused on what matters most — the betterment of every child."



Since joining the board, she's led with a focus on student needs and equity, guided by her core belief that leadership means doing what's best for all children.

"Always be respectful of others' opinions," she advises those seeking public office. "But be steadfast in your beliefs and focused on what matters most — the betterment of every child."

Faircloth's path of community service isn't confined to education. Her banking career began by chance when someone at a bank asked if she knew anyone looking for a job. Two weeks later, she was behind the counter as a teller. Over 27 years, she's moved through roles from personal banker to business and commercial support specialist and now serves as a financial services representative at First Citizens Bank.

"Early in life, I thought I'd become a teacher," she said. "But the Lord had other plans."

What's kept her in banking isn't the numbers. It's the people.

"I've built relationships with customers who've become friends and family," she said. "I've watched their children grow up and now I'm their banker too. That's special."

Helping customers find financial peace, whether solving a problem, recovering from fraud or just offering a listening ear, is deeply fulfilling for her.

Her Christian faith, she said, shapes how she serves both customers and students.

"My faith helps me be patient and kind and treat others with empathy," Faircloth said. "Whether I'm working with a student, a parent or a customer, I always ask, 'If this were my child or my parent, how would I want them to be treated?'"

This perspective grounds her, especially when she encounters a difficult customer or a tough board decision.

"Sometimes I question if I'm where I need to be," she admitted. "But then someone will say, 'I don't know what I'd do without you,' and I remember this is where I'm meant to be."

And where she's meant to be is also with her husband, Bobby — a retired South Carolina Highway Patrol trooper — and their three adult daughters: Taylor (Allen) of Lexington, Ceason (Jonah) of Ohio and Carrie and her fiancé, Avery, of Florence.

"Visiting with our kids and seeing them happy and successful, that's what gives me joy and peace," she said.

She and Bobby are also traveling the state, checking off stops on their journey to become "Ultimate Outsiders" — a designation for those who visit all South Carolina state parks.

"It's a great way to be active and appreciate the beauty of our state," she said.

But no matter where their travels take them, the Faircloths always make it back to Dillon – to their roots.

RETURN TO TOC

"I consulted with my late father, Woodrow H. Hodges ... He encouraged me to run for a position on my local school board; and because of God's grace and mercy, I am still able to be of service to my community."

Dr. James Hodges
June 2026 Civility Ambassador
Dorchester School District 4

Pickens' Garrisons: Quietly and Wholeheartedly the Order of the Palmetto

We've all heard the familiar refrain, "May I take your order?" or "How may I assist you?" In a restaurant or a retail store, it's routine. But for some, these questions are more than a polite inquiry. It's a way of life. For the School District of Pickens County Board of Trustee member Betty Garrison and her husband, Jim, servant leadership has always been the quiet, driving force behind decades of work in education, community service and family life. And now, that lifelong commitment has been honored with South Carolina's highest civilian award – The Order of the Palmetto.

Last month, inside the Cpt. Kimberly Hampton Memorial Library in Easley, surrounded by family, community members and former students, the Garrisons received this prestigious recognition. Their response? Characteristically humble.

"We've never done anything for the sake of recognition. But if our story inspires others to serve quietly and wholeheartedly, to look around and ask, 'How can I help?' then we are grateful."

"We've never done anything for the sake of recognition," said Betty. "But if our story inspires others to serve quietly and wholeheartedly, to look around and ask, 'How can I help?' then we are grateful."

Betty's 40-plus-year career in public education is a tapestry of purpose and people. She began as a home economics teacher at Easley High School, moved into roles as a guidance counselor, assistant principal and principal and ultimately brought her experience to the school board, where she's served as a trustee since 2016.

"Each chapter of my career, from classroom teacher to principal to board trustee, was shaped by mentors who believed in me," she said.

If Betty's life has been shaped by education, Jim's has been equally anchored in craftsmanship,



teaching and heartfelt vision. A U.S. Army Reserve veteran, land planner, builder and later a teacher of building construction at the SDPC Career & Technology Center, Jim's motto has always been, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right."

This principle guided one of the couple's most meaningful projects: the creation of the Cpt. Kimberly Hampton Memorial Park. Located beside the Easley library, the park honors a 1994 Easley High graduate and U.S. Army pilot who was the first female pilot in American history to lose her life in combat. Hampton was killed in Iraq in 2004 when her helicopter was shot down.

After years of persistence, including collaboration with the military and securing a helicopter from Fort Rucker, where Hampton trained, the park was dedicated in 2020. Operation Dragonfly, as it became known, now stands as a powerful symbol of courage, service and community remembrance.

Married for 53 years this August, the Garrisons

have long been guided by shared values of persistence, integrity and responsibility.

Their sons, Brad and Brian, along with their wives Julie and Crystal, have followed suit, raising their own children, Caden and Walker, with the same foundation.

"They've impacted so many, not just through official titles or roles, but through acts of quiet service," Brad said. "From salvaging a gym floor to baking pound cakes, to helping someone get a second chance, they always found ways to say, 'How can I help?'"

Betty has brought her firsthand knowledge of what students and teachers truly need – consistency, structure and adults who genuinely care.

Under her tenure, she's seen transformative changes at nearly every level of public education in her district.

"While curriculum and standards change, students still need to be known, supported and believed in," she said. "That will never change."

When asked what her "superpower" is, Betty resists the idea. "I've simply been surrounded by people who care deeply about students. Any impact I've had is because of those teams."

Her leadership has always been reflected in small, often unseen acts, including delivering meals to families, mentoring new administrators, supporting students in crisis and quietly helping wherever there's a need.

Faith has also been central to their lives. Their son Brian opened the award ceremony with a prayer thanking God not for the award itself, but for lives lived in alignment with purpose and grace.

"Hopefully, one day, that makes people ask why," he said. "And ultimately, maybe that points them to Jesus."

State Representative Neal Collins, who nominated the Garrisons for the Order of the Palmetto, described them simply, "They are icons."

He noted how rare it is for this honor to be awarded. In his words, "We'll never fully know how many lives they've impacted. And that's exactly how they would want it."

Easley's welcome sign reads, "The pride shows."

For the Garrisons, pride isn't about recognition. It's about people. It's about showing up. It's about answering life's most powerful question of, "How can I help?", quietly, consistently and with a full heart.

RETURN TO TOC

"I was always taught that service to others just comes with the responsibility we have as humans to participate in this life. The core value to care for and love the people around you."

Naomi Eckels
September 2025 Civility Ambassador
Bamberg County School District



Photo 1: *February 2026 Civility Ambassador Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty of Sumter School District* • **Photo 2:** *March 2026 Civility Ambassador Debra Holmes of Hampton County School District* • **Photo 3:** *May 2023 Civility Ambassador Beverly Bonaparte of Bamberg County School District with S.C. Rep. Justin Bamberg*

Bamberg's Eckels: The Total Package

A woman who moves with both a blueprint and a brushstroke

From metro Atlanta's swirl of cultures to the grounded soil of her grandparents' Bamberg farm, Naomi Eckels has always stood at the intersection of opposites and thrived. As vice chair of the Bamberg County School District Board of Trustees, she embodies a rare and vital blend of disciplined structure and compassionate advocacy. A logistician by training and a campaigner at heart, Eckels is a woman who strategizes with precision and dreams with boldness. Whether in the boardroom, the workplace or her blossoming backyard garden, Eckels brings the totality of her lived experience to every role she holds.

"I wanted to ensure that I made my best effort to fight for the children in my community to have access and opportunity for a bright future."

Though born in Atlanta, Eckels' soul was shaped just as much by summers in Bamberg, S.C., under the gentle yet firm hands of her grandparents, John and Sally Mae Haynes.

"I come from a stock rooted in strength and resilience," she said, citing her family as her first role models and compass.

From her mother's insistence to "read anything with words on it," to her grandparents' lived reverence for education despite its inaccessibility in their time, Eckels' personal narrative treats learning as a sacred inheritance.

There is a clear logistician's streak to Eckels. With a B.S. in computer information science from Spelman and an MBA in global management, she is fluent in the language of systems. Her 13-plus years in information technology and her current role as a relationship manager have sharpened her skills in accountability, planning and strategic execution.

"I believe in doing everything to the best of my ability and always following through with what I say I am going to do," she said.



But just beneath this structure lives a campaigner's soul or a heart which seeks connection, possibility and joy. Eckels is a community builder, volunteer, coach and cultivator of young minds. Whether she's leading a basketball team, nurturing seedlings on her family's farm or mentoring a student toward purpose, she leads with a philosophy grounded in faith and generosity.

"I strongly believe in the power of education, and that every child deserves the right to receive the best education we can provide for them," said Eckels. "I wanted to ensure that I made my best effort to fight for the children in my community to have access and opportunity for a bright future."

Ask Eckels what keeps her centered, and her answer is unwavering. It is her faith.

"My spiritual connection has always grounded me," she said, referencing a belief in divine timing and purpose which allows her to meet challenges with grace rather than fear.

This mindset was forged, in part, during one of the

most trying periods of her life, when her son was born prematurely while she was working out of state.

"I had to grow in ways that I never imagined because I had someone who had no choice but to depend on me," she said. "It taught me that our greatest challenges are often our greatest blessings."

One challenge she has vowed to face is being a voice for the voiceless, especially children whose futures are often decided in rooms they don't sit in. Her decision to run for the school board was not driven by politics, but by purpose.

"Their (parents and grandparents) steadfast commitment to learning helped me to develop a love and thirst for education, and the undeniable gift that you receive by sharing knowledge with others," said Eckels. "I was always taught that service to others just comes with the responsibility we have as humans to participate in this life. The core value to care for and love the people around you."

Eckels doesn't take her title as vice chair lightly. For her, it's a platform to ensure collaboration between educators, families and communities so the decisions reflect the lived realities of those they affect. In her world, policies are people-centered, and vision is never divorced from empathy.

Her current personal joy? Gardening. Her grandparents' land, once farmed out of necessity, is now being revived with both tradition and innovation.

"It is a genuine thrill to learn the science of how each plant thrives," she said. "... and to feel connected to my elders who lived and farmed the same land."

It's no small metaphor. Eckels is not just planting vegetables. She's nurturing legacies in her children, her colleagues and her community.

When asked what her ideal day looks like, she said, "Relaxing in nature...whether it be a garden, at the beach or a simple walk in the park."

Even in rest, her life speaks.

Eckels' journey serves as a reminder one can lead structured and spontaneous, serious and soft, grounded and growing lives all at once. In a world which often demands we choose between logic and love, Eckels chooses both. And then she shows how to lead with both, too.

RETURN TO TOC

"If you are a true and effective leader, you cannot isolate yourself from uncomfortable situations. In leadership, you must posture yourself to exhibit the qualities of the position you've attained."

Maggie James
June 2025 Civility Ambassador
Chester County School District

Orangeburg's Dr. O'Quinn: The Medicine Man

The longest actively serving school board member in the state

Before Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman ever stepped onto television screens as a frontier doctor defying convention, Branchville's own Dr. William E. O'Quinn was already practicing a similar brand of medicine, bridging science with compassion, tending both bodies and communities and earning the trust of generations.

For more than five decades, he has been a steady presence in Branchville, where families often grow up under the care of the same doctor. O'Quinn has devoted his life to medicine, education and public service, bringing care, dignity and resilience to a rural South Carolina town which leans on him as much as Colorado Springs leaned on its beloved TV doctor.

"It is an honor and privilege to be able to serve my community for this length of time. I have a sense of satisfaction for doing this. I have seen several generations over the years and have enjoyed it."

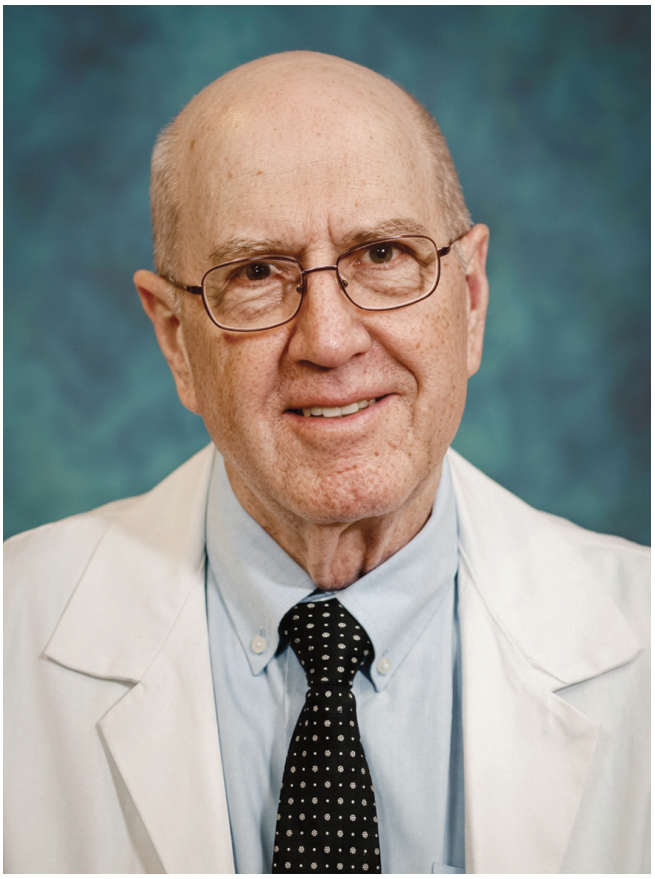
"It is an honor and privilege to be able to serve my community for this length of time," O'Quinn said. "I have a sense of satisfaction for doing this. I have seen several generations over the years and have enjoyed it."

O'Quinn's decision to pursue medicine came during his teenage years.

"I decided around the early high school years that I wanted to be a physician," he said. "I was especially encouraged by an aunt of mine and also had ties to a family physician that was a friend of the family that took care of me as a child and teenager."

O'Quinn credits his parents for instilling values which carried him through medical school and into community leadership.

"My mother had worked but was basically a stay-at-home mom. My father was dedicated to his work, and I learned my work ethics from him," he said. "They both basically said I could follow any profession I desired. I chose medicine."



Since 1975, O'Quinn has cared for Branchville families, offering continuity rare in modern health care. Alongside daily patient care, he has mentored physician assistants, nurse practitioners and medical students.

"I have seen how important it is to help shape future physicians into the role of a family physician," said O'Quinn. "The tools and technologies we use to practice medicine have changed over the years but the way that we actually care for patients does not need to change. We need to have compassion for our patients and their families."

His leadership has extended to medical organizations, including serving as president of the S.C. Academy of Family Physicians and as a board chair.

O'Quinn's civic service began in 1981, when he successfully ran as a write-in candidate for the local school board in Orangeburg. His children were attending the same schools he once did, and he saw

an opportunity to give back.

"I was encouraged by several to run and did so as a write-in candidate and was successful," said O'Quinn. "I was not dissatisfied with the board, I just felt I could help."

He has remained on the board through multiple consolidations, becoming the state's longest-serving active trustee.

His fellow board members said, during the COVID-19 pandemic, his medical training proved invaluable.

"I was able to help explain things to other board members and administration when needed," said O'Quinn.

Colleagues describe O'Quinn as genuine and steady, qualities he sees as an extension of his philosophy of service.

"I think it just proves that I try to follow the same path – students and teachers first," O'Quinn said. "I do try to make my voice heard, but I am willing to listen to other ideas. I have always tried to work with others to resolve our problems. I try to bring (them) all together when possible."

As for Branchville, it is more than O'Quinn's workplace. It is home. He and his wife, both graduates of local schools, built their lives together there.

"She actually taught 4K until she retired so I had an educator at home at all times," O'Quinn said. "Of course, all three children finished here and went on to college and graduate schools."

Two became educators initially and one a physician. One of the original educators then decided to become a pharmacist. He takes pride in knowing two of his children returned so their children could attend the same community schools.

Over the years, O'Quinn has witnessed change in Branchville, from the decline of Main Street shops to the resilience of its community school.

"But the town is more than just stores. It is the people and the way they interact," said O'Quinn. "It is a feeling of community. That has not changed."

His hope is Branchville's civic and educational traditions endure.

"We may not have the offerings of a large school, but with distance learning and other opportunities our students seem to do very well," said O'Quinn. "I hope we continue to do so."

RETURN TO TOC

"While curriculum and standards change, students still need to be known, supported and believed in. That will never change."

Betty Garrison
August 2025 Civility Ambassador
School District of Pickens County

Richland One's Clyburn: The Making of a Public Servant

In a quiet stretch of north Columbia stands a neighborhood that has shaped leaders, nurtured families and defined what it means to serve others. Greenview is a community born from the postwar promise of the GI Bill — a place built by veterans and visionaries, educators and public servants — where the American ideal of opportunity was not just imagined but lived.

Since its founding in the late 1940s, Greenview has been more than a neighborhood; it has been a blueprint for collective care. Families didn't just move there — they belonged there. Among its early residents were people whose impact would echo far beyond their streets. There was a University of South Carolina alumna who earned a master's degree in library science and spent nearly 40 years directing instructional technology for Richland One. There was a martial arts legend who opened his karate school and after-school care center to give back to the community that raised him. There was a civil rights attorney who moved back to care for her mother, who still lived in Greenview. And there were James and Emily Clyburn, who raised their children — including future leaders Mignon, Jennifer and Angela — in a home anchored by faith, education and service.

"If a child lives in a home without water or electricity, that's not just a home issue — it's a classroom issue."



"I grew up in Greenview surrounded by people who cared deeply for one another," said Angela Clyburn, now a second-term board member for Richland School District One and senior adviser for Care in Action. "My parents raised me and my siblings with a deep commitment to service, education and justice. Even as a child, I saw firsthand what it meant to care for your neighbors, to show up when it matters and to work for something larger than yourself."

For Angela, Greenview was a living classroom.

"It wasn't just our neighborhood — it was our extended family," she said. "Whether it was volunteering at local events, checking in on elderly neighbors or cleaning up the park, my parents taught us that leadership starts with showing up and giving back."

Her father often reminded her that real strength comes from serving others quietly and consistently, while her mother, Dr. Emily Clyburn, modeled compassion through action — the first to lend a hand, the last to seek credit.

When Dr. Emily Clyburn died in 2019, Angela found herself called to honor her mother's legacy in a deeper way.

"Her passing pushed me to act," Angela said. "In 2020, I ran for the Richland One school board, a role that allowed me to give back to the same schools and neighborhoods that shaped me."

Her mother's influence — a blend of compassion and conviction — became the foundation of Angela's leadership philosophy. In 2022, she expanded her

reach nationally as senior adviser with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, where she advocates for domestic workers and caregivers — most of whom are women of color doing essential, yet too often invisible, labor.

"That work is personal," Angela said. "It reflects the values instilled in me from Greenview — dignity, equity and lifting up those whose voices are often left out."

As the daughter of U.S. Rep. James E. Clyburn, Angela grew up observing leadership not as authority but as responsibility.

"What stands out most about my father is how he handles disagreement — by listening first, understanding where others are coming from and then responding thoughtfully to find common ground," she said. "That approach shapes how I see civic responsibility. It's not about representing people who agree with you; it's about serving everyone."

Angela carries this philosophy into every space she enters — from boardrooms to classrooms to community centers. Her previous work with Wateree Community Actions Inc., which helps low-income families, directly connects to her belief that equity in education begins with meeting families' basic needs.

"If a child lives in a home without water or electricity, that's not just a home issue — it's a classroom issue," she said. "Strong families build strong students, and strong students build strong communities."

Today, Angela is raising her own children in the same schools she attended.

"I want them to know they come from a community that believes in them," she said. "By staying rooted here, I'm showing that I believe in Richland One, in our teachers and in our future."

Her message to other parents is simple but powerful: Schools thrive when communities engage.

"When we participate — by volunteering, attending events and supporting one another — we don't just lift our own children; we strengthen the entire community."

Asked what legacy she hopes to leave, Angela said she wants to be remembered as someone who led with empathy, listened with intention and made decisions rooted in equity and care.

"I want people to say I showed up for students, for families, for the community — and that I never lost sight of who I was serving," she said.

Her journey from the tree-lined streets of Greenview to the halls of leadership is living proof that community creates likeness born not of position but of purpose — not of proximity but of shared values — which don't just shape lives but shape leaders.

RETURN TO TOC

"Whether I'm working with a student, a parent or a customer, I always ask, 'If this were my child or my parent, how would I want them to be treated?'"

Amanda Taylor Faircloth
July 2025 Civility Ambassador
Dillon School District Four

A Legacy in Full Harvest: How Williamsburg's Burgess Became a Modern Renaissance Man

A Renaissance Man is often described as someone accomplished across multiple disciplines, a person whose curiosity, expertise and service stretch well beyond a single field. Few fit this description more fully than Mack Jacobi Burgess, the District 2 representative on the Williamsburg County School District Board of Trustees. He is a lifelong educator, decorated veteran, coach, principal, mentor and community pillar whose life reflects service, scholarship and deep devotion to the people who shaped him.



"Education is the backbone of my family. My parents were strict but supportive, and they made it clear failure was not an option."

Burgess grew up in a family rooted in education. He and his four brothers were raised by parents who spent more than 40 years working in Williamsburg County Schools. Their influence set the tone for everything he would become.

"Education is the backbone of my family," Burgess said. "My parents were strict but supportive, and they made it clear failure was not an option."

His early years in Cades, a small community in northern Williamsburg County, doubled as lessons in responsibility and service. The family farm served as both classroom and character forge. His father raised cows, planted cucumbers, soybeans, corn and watermelons, and tended a garden large enough to feed the wider community.

"He grew just about every vegetable you can think of and shared it with our neighborhood and many of his colleagues," Burgess said.

Cades shaped him, but Nesmith later became his spiritual and relational anchor. The rural community, his mother's birthplace, became his home after he inherited the land she cherished.

"Nesmith means a lot to me because of the strong sense of community and the incredible hunting land full of deer and turkey," he said. "People look out for one another, and that's why I chose to settle here."

As the middle child among five boys, Burgess grew up with examples of academic excellence. Four brothers earned degrees in elementary education and one in mass communications. All pursued graduate studies. One became a doctoral-level leader in higher education with service at institutions including St. Augustine's University and Florida A&M University. Expectations were clear: earn degrees, return home, serve others.

Burgess followed the same path. After graduating from South Carolina State University in 1999 with a degree in elementary education, he began a career that quickly grew beyond the classroom. At W.M. Anderson Primary in Kingstree, he taught second grade and coached baseball, football and basketball, blending academics with mentorship.

He recalls one student on homebound instruction due to kidney complications, a child he taught to read, to solve math problems and to set goals. The

boy later became the honorary baseball manager at Kingstree High School and now owns a trucking company.

"Moments like that showed me my calling was not just on the baseball field but in shaping lives through education," Burgess said.

He pursued advanced degrees, earning a master's in educational administration and an Ed.S. in educational leadership. In 2006, he became an assistant principal and, 12 years later, principal of McDonald Elementary School, a role he calls one of his greatest blessings.

Burgess also served eight years in the S.C. Army National Guard, achieving the rank of E-4 Specialist before receiving an honorable discharge.

His greatest mentor, he said, was his father, Mack H. Burgess Sr., a teacher, coach, administrator, firefighter, church leader and philanthropist. His influence echoes in every lesson Burgess passes to students.

"He taught me to treat people the way I wanted to be treated," Burgess said. "He always reminded me to show respect by saying 'yes ma'am' and 'yes sir' because you must give respect to receive it."

His mother, Janie, who was an English teacher, shaped him through her love of literature and belief in lifelong learning.

Among Burgess's signature contributions is "Dress for Success," an initiative grounded in the belief that presentation reflects discipline, confidence and pride. Inspired by his father's expectations and his own standards as a student teacher, he launched Tie Tuesday, Guys With Ties and Girls With Pearls. Support has come from around the world, turning one boy's question about "church clothes" into a movement that reshaped campus culture at McDonald Elementary.

In 2021, Burgess was elected to the Williamsburg County School Board seat previously held by the late Gladys Dorsey. Before running, he sought blessings from both his family and the Dorsey family, a reflection of the respect that guides his leadership.

He views his dual service in Williamsburg County as trustee and Georgetown County as principal as a calling anchored in faith and supported by family. His wife, Elneicia, is a school nurse in Williamsburg County Schools. Their children — Trey, Tristen and Mackenzie — remain central to his work. His daughter has attended school with him for five years. His son now attends his alma mater, South Carolina State University.

From soldier to scholar, principal to board member, coach to mentor, and son of educators to father of future leaders, Burgess stands as a modern Renaissance Man. His life reflects mastery across roles, service across decades and leadership across communities.

RETURN TO TOC

"The core purpose of our school district is teaching and learning, but we must first ensure a safe and positive environment for our students."

Sharon Witkin
March 2025 Civility Ambassador
Colleton County School District



Photo 1: *(front row) Florence School District Three board member Paula Morris and former Superintendent Laura Hickson; (back row) SCSBA Executive Director Scott Price, May 2026 Civility Ambassador Dr. Julia Mims and Florence School District Three board member Barbara Singletary-Bryant* • **Photo 2:** *June 2024 Civility Ambassador Dr. "Tina" Gwozdz of Beaufort County School District* • **Photo 3:** *(from left) Lynn Stroble and March 2025 Civility Ambassador Sharon Witkin, both of Colleton County School District, S.C. Rep. Harriet A. Holman, S.C. Rep. Michael F. Rivers, Sr.*

the Civitas

2026

CIVILITY AMBASSADORS

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Iva's Davis: A legacy passed down in service, banking and faith

It is often said that legacy is what we leave behind. For Christopher Nakia Davis, legacy is also what was handed to him carefully, intentionally and across generations. In Iva, S.C., where roots run deep and community ties matter, Davis' life tells a story not just of personal success, but of stewardship — of name, profession, faith, education and service passed down and lived forward.

Even his name carries history. Davis' middle name, Nakia — the name he has always gone by — was inspired by a television western his mother loved while pregnant with him. What began as a thoughtful choice became an identity that would come to symbolize continuity and character. Much like his name, Davis' path in life would follow a lineage shaped by purpose and example.

"Growing up in a small community gives you a chance to serve and grow where everyone pitches in to make things happen."

Born and raised in Iva, a town of fewer than 2,000 people, Davis grew up in a place defined by simplicity, shared responsibility and an unmistakable sense of family.

"Everybody knows each other," he said. "It's like one big family. Growing up in a small community gives you a chance to serve and grow where everyone pitches in to make things happen."

From the fire department to youth sports and school mentoring programs, Davis learned early how strong communities are built by people who show up. The lesson continues to guide him today through his service as president of the Iva Recreation Association, where more than 1,000 children are served annually, his role as assistant golf coach at the local high school and even pulling the chains on Friday nights on the same football field where he once played more than three decades ago.

Davis is a third-generation community banker, a calling he recognized before he was 10 years old. His grandfather served as president of a local



community bank for more than 40 years.

"I still remember going by his office and sitting in his chair behind his desk, using the typewriter," Davis said. "I told him I wanted to be a banker like him."

This childhood aspiration became reality and responsibility. Davis now serves as president and CEO of The Commercial Bank, an institution founded more than 90 years ago during the Great Depression, when banks across the country were closing their doors.

"Nothing is more rewarding than knowing you were able to help someone buy their first car, their first home or simply help them make a financial decision that ultimately affects them for the rest of their life," Davis said.

He often draws parallels between banking and school board service. Both, he said, are forms of community stewardship — roles that require trust, accountability and a servant's heart.

Service to public education also runs deep in

Davis' family. His grandfather, father and uncle all served on local school boards in Anderson County. When his uncle chose not to seek re-election to the Anderson County Board of Education, he encouraged Davis to run for his seat.

"It just seemed like the right thing to do," Davis said.

Serving the same district which educated him, his wife and their three daughters gives his role deeper meaning. Today, his wife and eldest daughter teach in Anderson School District Three, and his youngest daughter hopes to do the same after graduating from Anderson University (AU).

"When I look at what public education in a small town has done for my family," he said, "it makes me want to give back and make sure the next generation has even better opportunities."

AU holds a special place in Davis' life and legacy. His grandmother received a degree there and served on the university's Board of Visitors, and Davis himself completed his degree there while working full-time at the bank. Davis is now serving his fourth term on the AU Board of Trust. One daughter has already graduated from AU, and another is on track to graduate in 2027.

The university's faith-based environment and close-knit community left a lasting impression, especially during one of the most challenging moments of his life. While completing his senior project, Davis' first daughter was born nine weeks early and spent nearly two weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit. Classmates held study sessions in hospital waiting rooms, and professors checked in personally.

"It made a lifelong impression on me and makes me strive to give with a servant's heart," Davis said.

Faith is the foundation upon which Davis orders his family. It remains his greatest joy. Married to his high school sweetheart, Brooke, for more than 26 years, Davis is the father of three accomplished daughters. Coaching them through their youth sports years remains one of his most treasured roles.

When asked how he hopes to be remembered, Davis does not list titles or accomplishments. Instead, he returns to service.

"I hope they say he was hard-working and dedicated," he said. "But the most important words I hope to hear one day are, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant.'"

RETURN TO TOC

"Leaders must remember one essential truth: if no one follows, the role becomes insignificant and inconsequential."

Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty
February 2026 Civility Ambassador
Sumter School District

Sumter's Canty Leads From Every Seat

The 3 Ps of His Public Life: Presence, Perception, Persuasion

The Bible speaks of the typical human lifespan as around 70 years and 80, or fourscore, for the exceptionally strong. On Oct. 9, 1945, in Sumter, S.C., one of the most formidable and prolific community organizers to emerge from the Pee Dee region was born to the Rev. Benjamin F. Canty Sr. and Rena (Smith) Canty: Sumter School District Board of Trustees member the Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty.

"Civility is a credential of the civilized but an enigma for the uncouth."

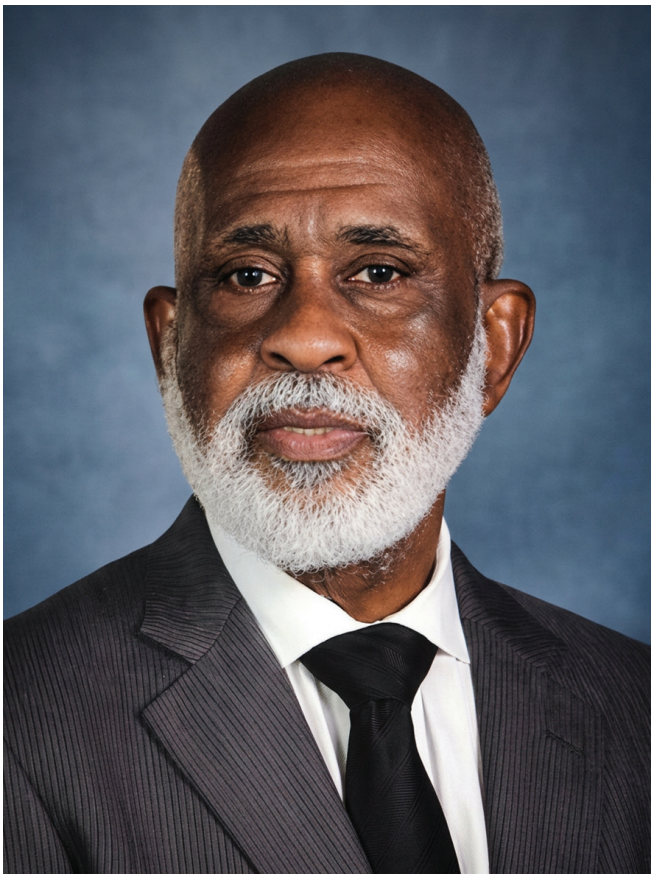
A combination of the Jim Crow era, the hood and, most profoundly, the church shaped his leadership acumen. Because he defines leadership through the three Ps — presence, perception and persuasion — rather than position, Canty said life behind the iron curtain of apartheid offered countless opportunities for development as a leader, spokesperson, advocate and crusader.

At age 10, he experienced the first of many "come to Jesus" moments shaping the leader he remains today.

On Sunday, Feb. 26, 1956, Canty's pastor, the Rev. H. P. Sharper, the Rev. J. A. Rice and Clarence Mitchell, longtime lobbyist for the NAACP, challenged the "whites only" ticket window and waiting area at the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Station in Florence, S.C.

The station featured separate facilities for white and African American passengers, a common segregation practice. The "colored" waiting room often occupied less prominent space. Mitchell and the others were arrested after using the "whites only" door. The incident drew national attention and contributed to the abolition of segregated entrances across the South.

"As a 10-year-old, I had no idea how far-reaching the implications of their actions were, but I knew it took courage to confront the system," Canty said. He learned of the incident the following Sunday when a church deacon briefed the congregation. "It gave me a new perspective on the 'whites only' barriers I had accepted as usual and customary. As I trembled in awe, my consciousness of race, self-worth and purpose changed radically."



Canty said he left church carrying renewed resolve to confront and dismantle hate, evil, oppression and injustice wherever they appeared.

From ages 14 to 18, Canty served as president of the Baptist Training Union at his home church and later was elected first treasurer of the youth department of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. during its founding.

He participated in the Boy Scouts of America and Explorers and served as president of the Teenage Birthday Club, the youth council and the Morris College NAACP chapter. He also served as president of his high school senior class, college sophomore class and the student government association.

Much of his early work focused on dismantling visible walls of segregation across his community. He later played a central role in designing the blueprint for the Sumter Movement of the NAACP,

which helped remove some of the remaining barriers.

Training during those years proved both experiential and intellectual, Canty said.

"When cross-cultural exchanges became more prevalent," he said, "I was comfortable sitting at the table as an equal."

While perspectives often differed, Canty insisted collaboration remained possible through shared vision, values and purpose. Wisdom offers pathways around distraction and obstruction where mutuality does not exist, Canty said. While racial divisiveness remains significant and must never be dismissed, divisiveness of any kind by any group also demands attention.

"Civility is a credential of the civilized but an enigma for the uncouth," Canty said.

Canty describes leadership as an art that galvanizes others, inspires pursuit of visions larger than life and empowers people to maximize collective ability beyond imagination.

"Leaders must remember one essential truth: if no one follows, the role becomes insignificant and inconsequential," he said.

Across decades, Canty often served in multiple leadership roles simultaneously, a pattern that characterized much of his adult life.

During the 1970s, he served as pastor at Savannah Grove Baptist Church while also operating Job's Mortuary Inc. and Hazel's Country Diner. At the same time, he was director of alumni affairs and public relations at Morris College and hosted a daily gospel radio broadcast.

In the 1980s, his service expanded further. He continued as pastor and proprietor of Job's Mortuary while serving as president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc. and the S.C. Baptist Congress of Christian Education. He also remained active as a radio host. At age 35, Canty said he became the youngest person ever elected to lead a major religious denomination in America.

During the 1990s, Canty again balanced multiple roles, serving as pastor, proprietor, member of the South Carolina General Assembly and radio host.

In later years, his leadership continued as pastor at Savannah Grove and West End Community Church, proprietor of Job's Mortuary and Smith-Canty Funeral Service, interim general secretary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, moderator of the Pee Dee Baptist Association and president of Iris Communications Inc. He also served intermittently as a school board member across several decades.

"Successful leadership across multiple roles," he said, "begins with understanding personal limitations, valuing others' abilities and surrounding oneself with capable contributors."

Critical to the emergence of his enduring legacy was his call to serve as pastor of Savannah Grove Baptist Church at age 23. Founded in 1866, the church was organized under a brush harbor on a one-acre parcel in Florence County's Effingham community. More than five decades later, the once-agrarian congregation has grown cosmopolitan in mission and ministry.

When he arrived, the campus covered five acres. Today, it spans 51 acres, including the Heritage Sanctuary (1939) and a new sanctuary, parsonage, educational complex, senior citizens facility, conference center and media center. The annual budget has grown from under $20,000 to more than $1 million.

In partnership with Florence County, the church supports a 21-acre community park featuring ballfields, courts, a walking track and picnic space. It also hosts a National Defense Fund Freedom School and supports SMART School, an in-house initiative providing student remediation and tutoring.

Despite these accomplishments, Canty said celebration matters less to him than accountability.

"(There are) moments which call us from the extreme to center, moments where character or color is not nearly as significant as community," Canty said.

Canty is married to the former Toye J. Richburg and is the father of six children, seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

RETURN TO TOC

Hampton's Holmes and a Garden Worth Planting

There is a saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." If this is true, imagine what an entire garden of fruits and vegetables could accomplish.

In 2020, one year after the pandemic began, Debra Holmes, board secretary for Hampton County School District, lost her husband. She sought healing through a family tradition continued with the late Rev. James Kenneth Holmes: gardening.

"I could not go to work, so I began planting and growing," Holmes said. "Spending hours in the sun and fresh air with my hands in the dirt was therapeutic."

Holmes' love of gardening traces back to her grandfather, the late Rev. Clarence L. Fennell, a farmer and pastor who provided fresh produce to his community. His legacy inspired Holmes to turn her passion into a business—HolmesGrown Farms.

"Because of his philanthropy, the elementary school in Yemassee is named in his honor," she said. "As a child, I watched my parents, uncles and grandparents grow various vegetables. When I became an adult, my husband and I always had a small garden."

HolmesGrown Farms offers a wide variety of fresh produce, from strawberries, watermelons, tomatoes and cucumbers to beans, peas, okra, greens, peppers, cabbage, collards and corn.

"Patience is essential when listening to others' concerns and communicating with different personalities."

Farming is only one of Holmes' inherited legacies.

"Entrepreneurship and service are part of my DNA," she said. "My parents were entrepreneurs, and my paternal grandparents were business owners. After college, I worked in my family's businesses."

When her parents retired, Holmes followed her passion, founding Aaron's Embroidery in Hampton, S.C. She said she balances business with giving back.

"I enjoy seeing the smiles on my customers' faces when I create personalized items," she said. "There's nothing like giving a gift that shows thought and effort."



Holmes also helps businesses promote their brands through clothing, calling it "…just another way I serve."

Inspired by her father, a licensed contractor and electrician, she also explores real estate.

"As a child, I followed him on various jobsites," she said. "Passing him tools and assisting however I could helped me develop a love of building, restoring and revitalizing properties."

Her experience as a business owner taught her patience and effective communication, skills she has applied as a school board member for the past seven years.

"Patience is essential when listening to others' concerns and communicating with different personalities," she said. "As a board member, I try to understand viewpoints and remain flexible to make decisions in the best interest of families, teachers, staff and the district."

Lessons from gardening and entrepreneurship translate into service, Holmes said.

"Being part of a school system that shapes young minds academically and molds character extends my love of seeing things come to life through service and care," she said.

Holmes grew up surrounded by people who give selflessly.

"I am often thanked for decisions in business and on the board that create positive change," she said. "It feels good to know I contribute to improvements in students', families' and staff lives."

As first lady of a congregation, married to a pastor, Holmes embraced the same commitment to service her mother modeled. She said growing up in a Christian home, she saw the sacrifices her parents made to defend others' rights.

"As a child in the late sixties and early seventies, I watched my father take unpaid time off work to fight for people mistreated on their jobs," she said. "People knew he would speak up for those who didn't know how."

Holmes' children continue the tradition through a foundation honoring their father. The foundation provides scholarships to high school students planning college and supports mentorship programs.

Whether as a school board member, first lady, gardener, entrepreneur or mother, her service embodies "community civility," Holmes said.

"To be part of a team working to provide a safe place for students to learn and grow is a wonderful feeling," she said. "It extends my love of building and growing."

RETURN TO TOC

APRIL 2026 CIVILITY AMBASSADOR

Kershaw's Dr. King and the Various Fields of Dream



Veteran, educator, entrepreneur, public information officer, naturalist, farmer and explosives ordnance disposal technician are occupations which seem to have little in common. Yet each were used to create the person of Kershaw County School District board member Dr. Charles King.

Any parent can attest to the difficulty of serving as nurturer, guide and provider for a child's physical, emotional, social and educational development while also offering safety and support. If the role sounds similar to the responsibilities educators carry, it is because the two often overlap, said Dr. King.

"Of all the elected capacities, it is often said being a school board member is the toughest and sometimes the most thankless," he said. "Additionally, decisions sometimes must be made which can be life-changing for those involved."

A Kershaw County School District education, combined with a strong and loving family, prepared him for leadership throughout his life.

He credits his father, one of his high school teachers Bill Jackson, an uncle and Aaron Hough, who served as his middle and high school administrator, with encouraging him to dream bigger.

"(They) always pushed me to achieve more than I

thought I could and be better than I thought I was," said Dr. King. "(What's) interesting is Mr. Hough called me 'Dr. King' even when I was in middle school."

Dr. King was elected the first senior class president of the new North Central High School following the 1979 merger of Mt. Pisgah, Baron DeKalb and Midway high schools, and he has been running ever since.

In addition to his campaigns for school board, which have resulted in nearly nine years of cumulative service, Dr. King has completed an Ironman triathlon, a marathon and numerous survival runs. He also fulfilled a lifelong dream of owning his own health club.

"Exercise has been and still is a huge part of my life," he said. "Now, as a retiree, it is as important as ever for me to stay active and in good physical condition."

"As a school board member, I have found it has been invaluable to have the experience of being a career educator and a private sector business owner."

Few experiences challenged him more physically or shaped his professional path more than service in the U.S. Marine Corps immediately after earning his undergraduate degree.

"During my military service I was an instructor in a specialty school, and this sparked my interest in teaching," said Dr. King.

After earning a master's degree and teacher certification, he spent five years in the classroom, mostly teaching seventh grade science. He also taught high school biology for one year. Over time Dr. King moved into leadership, serving as assistant principal and principal in his home district before becoming associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction, associate superintendent for operations and interim superintendent in Chester County.

He eventually retired from Kershaw County School District as an employee, though he continues to serve the community as a school board member.

Today Dr. King supports his wife Wendy in her veterinary practice.

"I take care of the administrative side of the business," he said. "As a school board member, I have found it has been invaluable to have the experience of being a career educator and a private sector business owner."

Both of his adult children have followed a similar path of service.

"I'm extremely proud to say both of them are now district employees," he said. "Even though my kids are adults, I am still a doting dad and regularly spend time with them."

For Dr. King, the many roles he has held — Marine, teacher, administrator, business owner and school board member — are simply different ways of serving the same purpose: investing in people and helping the next generation reach its potential.

RETURN TO TOC

"We must demonstrate true love and respect for the people we serve."

Dr. Willie Campbell
April 2025 Civility Ambassador
Edgefield County School District

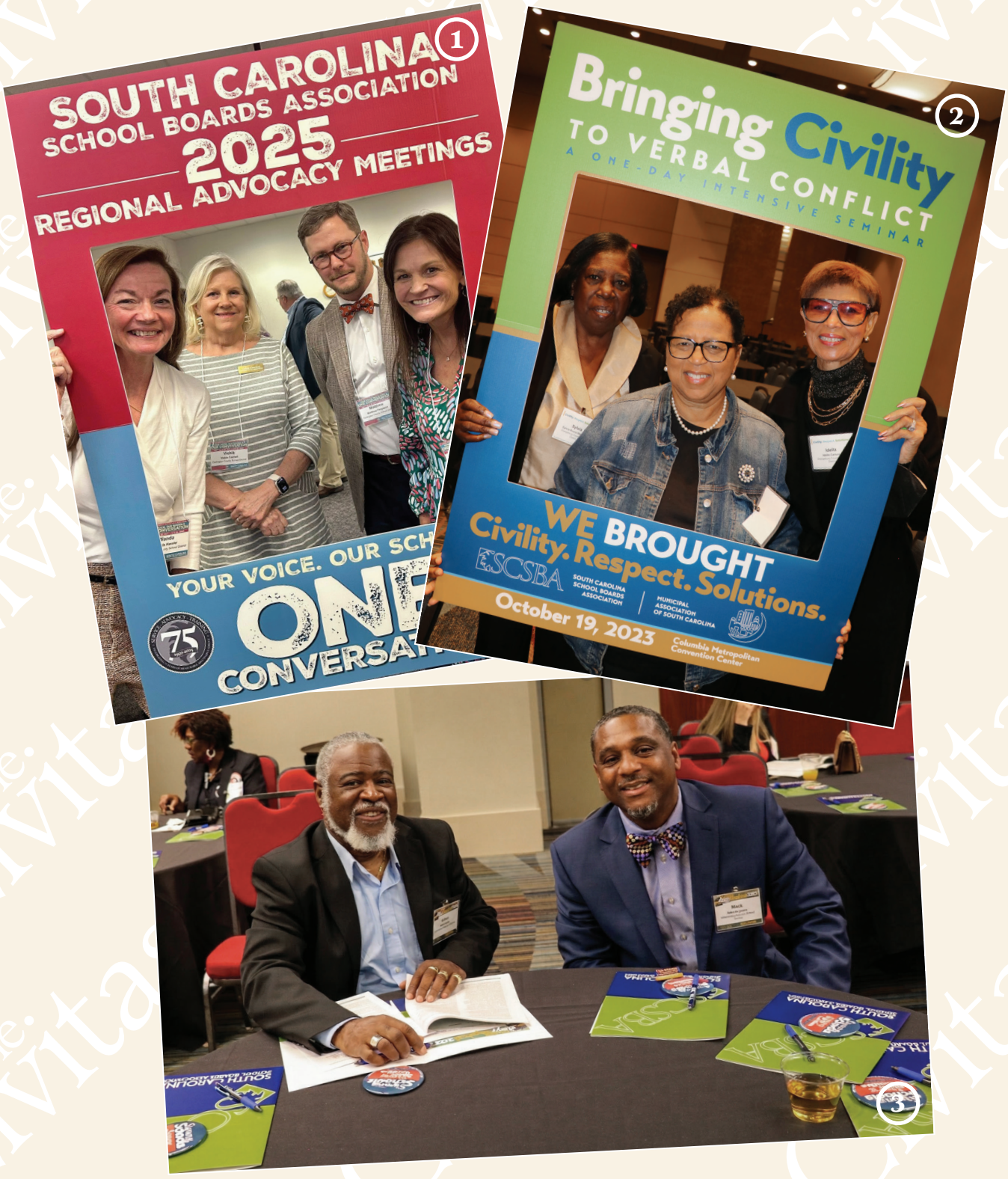


Photo 1: *(from left) Darlington County School District Board Chair Wanda Hassler, board member Vickie Carrieri, Superintendent Dr. Matthew Ferguson, and Board Vice Chair Leigh Anne Kelley* • **Photo 2:** *(from left) Orangeburg County School District board members Dr. Sylvia Bruce-Stephens, Mary Berry Ulmer and Idella W. Carson* • **Photo 3:** *(from left) Clarendon County School District board member Arthur Moyd with November 2025 Civility Ambassador Mack Burgess of Williamsburg County School District*

Lake City's Dr. Mims: The ArtFields of Science and an Ounce of Cure

Long before its annual arts festival, ArtFields, and philanthropist Darla Moore helped position Lake City as a cultural hub of rural America, a different kind of foundation was already in place. At the heart of this town of nearly 6,000 residents stood a power couple committed to something just as essential: access to quality healthcare.

One diagnosed and prescribed. The other ensured the cure was filled.

Florence School District Three Board of Trustees member Dr. Julia Mims serves as a pharmacist, while her husband, Dr. Albert Mims, practices family medicine. Together, their work reflects a shared calling rooted in service.

Today, much like the care she puts into crafting the Ooey Gooey Butter Cakes she is known for throughout her community, Dr. Mims brings precision, creativity and care to the science of pharmacy. For her, both baking and medicine require the same discipline: understanding how individual ingredients come together to produce the right outcome.

"In healthcare, you evaluate information carefully and determine what is best for the patient. That same approach applies to school board decisions. You weigh both sides before acting."

Her love of science began early, shaped by her upbringing in Lake City and influenced by a powerful example close to home.

"One of my favorite pastimes was going to the Corner Drug Store owned by my uncle, a World War II veteran who went to pharmacy school on the GI Bill after the war," Dr. Mims said. "My uncle loved helping people. He would go out all hours of the day and night to fill prescriptions for sick patients."



She remembers him not only as a pharmacist, but as a faithful church member, a community servant and someone who brought both compassion and humor to his work. While some might describe it as good bedside manner, Dr. Mims simply saw inspiration.

"I was fascinated with all the bottles of medication," she said. "I wanted to be a scientist who helped discover a cure for cancer."

Even after her uncle sold the store while she was in high school, she returned to work there during pharmacy school, reinforcing a path already set in motion.

Fifteen years after beginning her career, Dr. Mims felt called to serve in a different way. She ran for the school board, where she has served intermittently for more than 25 years.

"The importance of a good education and the doors it can open for children motivated me to run,"

she said. "My hope was to help make decisions that would allow our children to succeed."

Her dual roles in healthcare and education converged in one of the most difficult periods in recent history: the COVID-19 pandemic.

"As a hospital pharmacist, I went to work every day terrified I would get COVID. I saw patients dying every day," she said. "My fear was that students, teachers and school employees would contract COVID and die."

Navigating public concern and criticism added another layer of complexity.

"It was disheartening to see some parents view schools as babysitting services and not consider the seriousness of COVID," she said. "It was tough to listen to the verbal abuse, but the goal was always to make the best decision for everyone's safety."

Her background in healthcare shaped how she approached those decisions.

"In healthcare, you evaluate information carefully and determine what is best for the patient," she said. "That same approach applies to school board decisions. You weigh both sides before acting."

This mindset extends beyond decision-making into how she engages with others. Dr. Mims values thoughtful dialogue and diverse perspectives, something reflected even in her imagined guest list for a dream dinner party: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Steve Martin, Henry David Thoreau, Paul McCartney, Michelangelo, Teddy Roosevelt, Johann Sebastian Bach and Michelle Obama.

"I admire each of these individuals," she said. "Each would bring a different and interesting perspective to the conversation."

Whether in a hospital, a boardroom or her own kitchen, Dr. Mims approaches her work with the same guiding principle: care for people, respect the process and remain committed to making a difference.

In Lake City, this commitment has become both her practice and her legacy.

*ArtFields is Lake City, S.C.'s signature arts festival and community revitalization initiative, using visual art to bring visitors, investment and cultural energy to the town.

RETURN TO TOC

"I do try to make my voice heard, but I am willing to listen to other ideas. I have always tried to work with others to resolve our problems. I try to bring (them) all together when possible."

Dr. William E. O'Quinn
October 2025 Civility Ambassador
Orangeburg County School District

St. George's Hodges: A Steady Presence in Service

In the upper reaches of Dorchester County sits the small town of St. George, home of the World Grits Festival. Though its population hovers around 2,000 residents, locals proudly claim it boasts the highest per capita consumption of grits anywhere in the world. The festival itself is a testament to the town's character, complete with a signature contest where participants roll in a vat of grits, competing to see who can emerge with the most sticking to them.

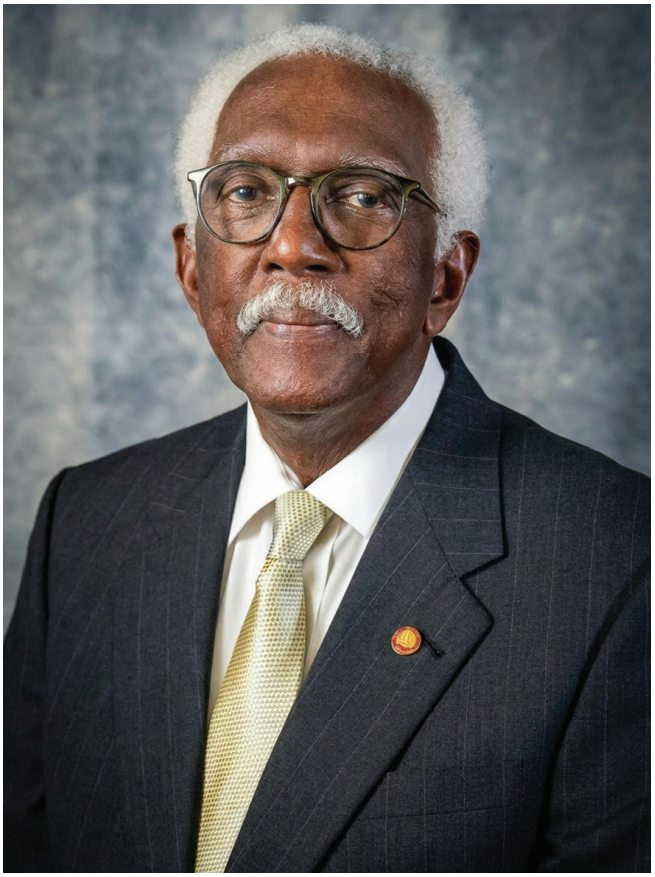
The same sense of persistence and "stick-to-itiveness" can be found in Dr. James Hodges. A longtime servant leader, Dr. Hodges has dedicated decades to his community, including his role as secretary of the Dorchester School District 4 (DD4) Board of Trustees. This November will mark an impressive 35 years of board service, having initially been inspired by someone else's service.

"As with many major decisions I made during my lifetime, I consulted with my late father, Woodrow H. Hodges, who served on the Palmetto Rural Telephone Company board for many years," said Dr. Hodges. "He encouraged me to run for a position on my local school board; and because of God's grace and mercy, I am still able to be of service to my community."

"Momma and daddy worked in the same building. However, it was designed with separate entrances to accommodate their clientele. Momma had her side and daddy had his side."

In addition to his contributions to education, Dr. Hodges became a cornerstone of the local business community. He owned and operated Cash Discount Drug Store in St. George for 30 years before selling the business in 2014, leaving behind a legacy of care, commitment and connection.

Prior to owning the pharmacy and shortly after completing his studies at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), Dr. Hodges worked as a pharmacist at Sea Island Healthcare Center on Johns



Island. His eldest daughter, Jona' L. Hodges, was in the tenth grade when he acquired the pharmacy — a milestone that deepened the admiration she and her siblings held for both of their parents.

Jona' said as a teen, she witnessed first-hand, her parents helping sick people who came to the pharmacy for advice on over-the-counter products until they were able to see their physician.

"One feels a sense of admiration from observing and realizing the relationships and trust the community has placed in your parent," said Jona'.

Her parents' service extended well beyond the pharmacy counter. Deeply rooted in Springtown United Methodist Church, Dr. Hodges and his late wife, Janie M. Hodges, devoted countless hours to worship, ministry and volunteer service.

"Daddy traveled to pick up bread donations for the church's food bank distribution, and he and momma worked alongside each other onsite at the food bank for years," Jona' said.

When the pastor was away, church members often

looked to Dr. Hodges, a lifelong lay leader, to deliver the Sunday message.

It was fitting for a man whose life consistently reflected steadiness more than spotlight.

This same dependable presence extended beyond the walls of the church. Whether serving customers at Cash Discount Drug Store, mentoring younger generations or helping guide decisions as a member of the DD4 board, Dr. Hodges became a trusted figure in the lives of countless families throughout the community.

Long before receiving statewide recognition, residents in St. George already understood his value.

In 2021, MUSC honored Dr. Hodges as the College of Pharmacy's Distinguished Alumnus, the institution's highest alumni recognition. The honor carried particular significance because in 1971, he became the first African American graduate of the MUSC College of Pharmacy.

At a time when racial tensions remained high across the country, Dr. Hodges quietly persevered.

"You have to understand, the racial tension was high during the time I was there, but I was there for a purpose," Hodges shared during a return visit to MUSC. "In order for me to do what I needed to do, I had to keep my focus on my work."

This mindset would shape the remainder of his life.

Raised in nearby Walterboro, Dr. Hodges grew up watching his parents operate Hodges Barber and Beauty Shop.

"Momma and daddy worked in the same building. However, it was designed with separate entrances to accommodate their clientele," he said. "Momma had her side and daddy had his side."

The shop, along with life on the family farm, taught him discipline, hard work and the importance of serving people well. Those values followed him to Claflin University and eventually to MUSC, where he entered pharmacy school during a transformative period in both South Carolina and the nation.

He often credits his father for encouraging him to pursue pharmacy, believing the profession would allow him to build stability for his family while serving others.

After graduation, Dr. Hodges spent several years working as a pharmacist before purchasing Cash Discount Drug Store in St. George in 1984. Known for his patience and skill in compounding medications, he built lasting relationships with generations of customers.

"I was never in a hurry," Hodges said. "I wanted to do it right."

Outside of work and public service, family members describe Dr. Hodges as a man who appreciated life's simpler pleasures. He enjoyed watching "Perry Mason," singing in the choir and male chorus at Springtown United Methodist Church, tending his immaculate yard and spending time outdoors with his sons.

He especially loved meals prepared by his wife, whose cooking became part of the rhythm of family life.

"Momma loved to cook and daddy loved eating everything she prepared, especially the cakes she made from scratch," Jona' said.

Though accomplished professionally, Dr. Hodges remained most passionate about helping others, particularly elderly residents and those who were sick or shut in. Family members recall him and his wife routinely stopping to check on neighbors, often without recognition or fanfare.

Though his service as a member of the DD4 board hasn't outlasted his 43-year tenure as a licensed pharmacist yet, Dr. Hodges has certainly made headway.

Now, at 80, Dr. Hodges and his adult children – Jona' L. Hodges, James L. Hodges, II (deceased), Jametta Hodges Stewart, James W. Hodges, Joel E. Hodges and Justin P. Hodges – rest in and on the same quiet strength which has long defined his life of service, and his legacy remains firmly rooted in the community he helped shape.

For decades, residents entered Cash Discount Drug Store seeking medicine, advice and reassurance. Students benefited from his leadership on the school board. Church members worshiped beside him. Neighbors watched him serve without fanfare.

In many ways, Dr. Hodges has become exactly what St. George prides itself on being: dependable, welcoming and grounded in community.

RETURN TO TOC

Greenville's Goodwin-Calwile: An Educator First, A Leader Always

From the family living room to the classroom, and from neighborhood's public schools to district leadership, Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees member Michelle Goodwin-Calwile has devoted her entire adult life to teaching, mentoring and advocating for public education.

Whether serving as a family literacy teacher, parent educator, Title I facilitator, teen center director or, for nearly a decade, representing Area 25 on the Greenville County Schools Board of Trustees, Goodwin-Calwile has touched generations of students and families. Throughout Greenville County, few have not either heard her voice or benefited from her work.

"What prepared me to serve effectively is that I'm an educator first ... I look at every decision through the lens of someone who worked in the school system, where we analyzed data and made decisions based on students' needs."

"What prepared me to serve effectively is that I'm an educator first," Goodwin-Calwile said. "That's why I believe I serve effectively. I look at every decision through the lens of someone who worked in the school system, where we analyzed data and made decisions based on students' needs."

Her effectiveness, however, extends far beyond data.

Those who know Goodwin-Calwile often point to her hands-on leadership and her ability to build authentic relationships across the community.

"Building relationships with my community allows me to understand their concerns and connect them



with the right people so issues can be addressed in a timely manner," she said. "I also helped our board understand that when people know they're seen, heard and communicated with in different ways, they become invested in the success of our schools."

This commitment reaches beyond the district she represents.

"We find common ground, which is our students, faculty and staff," she said. "Even though we come from different parts of the county, we have to remember we're representing all of Greenville County."

This countywide perspective began long before she sought elected office.

A graduate of Greenville County Schools, Goodwin-Calwile attended district schools, eventually graduating from Carolina High School. She earned a bachelor's degree from Winthrop University, followed by master's degrees from

Converse University and Furman University.

After retiring from the district in 2016, she pursued a seat on the school board. Despite a distinguished career in education, she quickly discovered there was still much to learn.

"I didn't realize going into it that the board's role is policymaking," she said. "The school board has only one employee, the superintendent. The superintendent oversees the day-to-day operations of the district while carrying out the policies established by the board and ensuring compliance."

Understanding those distinct responsibilities, she said, allows trustees and administrators to work together effectively.

"When the superintendent, district administrators and staff are empowered to do their jobs and have the tools they need through strong board governance, that's when students benefit," she said.

Her philosophy of leadership was shaped by years spent working directly with families.

"As a family literacy teacher, I was amazed that so many of my students, the parents, were determined that their children wouldn't drop out the way they had," she said. "They understood that education could change the course of their children's lives."

As a parent educator, she helped families prepare young children for school while connecting parents with resources to support learning at home.

Later, as a Title I facilitator, Goodwin-Calwile worked with schools to implement research-based strategies designed to improve student achievement.

"We worked hard on academics, but we also created extracurricular educational opportunities students could enjoy after putting in the work," she said. "We went from being a failing school to an exemplary school within seven years. Our staff loved our students, and our students knew it. Those experiences shaped me into the servant leader I am today."

If experience is life's greatest teacher, Goodwin-Calwile's classroom has always extended beyond the walls of a school.

She is the mother of one daughter, Myai, and raised her niece, Asia, as her own. She is also a proud grandmother of four and serves as a part-time caregiver for her 86-year-old mother, Malenda Goodwin.

Family remains at the center of her life. Each summer, she and her extended family travel together, taking time to recharge before returning to the work of serving their community.

Whether mentoring students, supporting families, shaping board policy or helping neighbors navigate the school system, Goodwin-Calwile approaches every responsibility with the same guiding principle.

"I'm an educator first," she said.

Nearly a decade into public service, this philosophy continues to define both her leadership and the legacy she is building for Greenville County's students and families.

RETURN TO TOC

"I was never in a hurry. I wanted to do it right."

Dr. James Hodges
June 2026 Civility Ambassador
Dorchester School District Four

Darlington's Hassler: A cadence of service all her own

One of the most obvious characteristics of Darlington County School District's Board Chair Wanda Hassler is how impeccably she presents herself. Always polished and dress-right-dress, she embodies a quiet confidence not born of pomp and circumstance but more a walking, talking presence of grace and discipline.

The discipline traces back to her five years of active-duty service as a captain in the U.S. Air Force after graduating from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's School of Nursing. Hassler's military job or Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) was 9756 (clinical nurse), serving in the intensive care unit (ICU) at Wilford Hall Medical Center on Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

"(Service) and sharing our blessings was not optional. It was a civic responsibility. One of the verses that has guided my life is Luke 12:48: 'To whom much is given, much will be required.'"

"Active-duty and retired personnel from all over the world could be AeroVac'ed there for treatment, which exposed me to a wide range of complex medical cases," said Hassler. "I was also trained as a flight registered nurse (RN). My civilian nursing education directly influenced my military role and gave me opportunities for leadership and specialized training that I would not have experienced otherwise."

Hassler said her passion for service was modeled by her parents and grandparents who deemed it as more a commandment than a suggestion.

"(Service) and sharing our blessings was not optional. It was a civic responsibility," Hassler said. "One of the verses that has guided my life is Luke 12:48: 'To whom much is given, much will be required.' That sense of responsibility has shaped my approach to every role I have held, and I hope



that example will continue through my children and future generations of our family."

When Hassler's husband, Terry, completed his military service following a tour with Operation Desert Storm, the couple decided to settle close to her hometown of Rockingham, N.C. They settled in Hartsville, S.C., approximately one hour away.

"Hartsville was the first place we visited together, and it immediately felt right," she said. "It offered proximity to my parents, a growing medical community and the kind of environment where we believed we could raise a family."

While Terry built his medical practice, Hartsville Orthopedics and Sports Medicine, Hassler worked to master her work as a stay-at-home mom.

"As they entered school, my role naturally evolved into volunteer service," said Hassler.

She was Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president, helped establish the Carolina Elementary School Education Foundation, and co-chaired the successful 2003 Darlington County School District

bond referendum. She also helped guide the district through major capital improvements in the 2016 bond referendum. She attributes the success of both to trust being built within the community.

"Every project was centered on optimizing student achievement and providing safe, effective learning environments," she said.

And, some 35 years later, as grounded as the roots of a tree planted by the river, the Hasslers remain convinced they made the right decision to make Hartsville their home. Their four children are all products of Darlington County School District and now live and work in Washington, D.C., Iceland, Atlanta and Montana.

Education and service were deeply rooted in Hassler's upbringing. Her father served as a principal for more than 30 years, instilling in her an appreciation for the transformative power of public education.

"My father dropped out of school in seventh grade to help out on the family farm after the death of his father," Hassler said. "Through determination and with encouragement of mentors who recognized his potential, he ultimately earned his Ph.D. from Duke University."

History showed her firsthand how education can transform a life, she said. Just as others had invested in her father's success, he was able to create opportunities for them which would not have been possible otherwise. That's why when the opportunity arose to serve on the school board, Hassler said her family fully supported her decision. Along with her family, Hassler said Dr. Allen McCutchen who once held the seat she now holds, was a wonderful inspiration, calling him a pioneering educator.

"He was a fair, thoughtful and measured leader who never sought the spotlight," said Hassler. "He simply focused on fulfilling his responsibilities with integrity."

As for the immediate future, Hassler is preparing for yet another referendum to be held November.

"We were transparent about facility needs and used a regularly updated facilities study to prioritize projects (in the first two)," she said. "We have continued that same approach through community listening sessions, taking public feedback seriously and have modified plans based on what we heard."

It is Hassler's belief people are far more willing to support a plan when they feel included in the process and when leaders are honest about both the needs and the costs.

"Even as board chair, I remain one of eight members and my vote carries no more or less weight than anyone else's," she said concerning collaboration.

More than any building project though, Hassler said she hopes her legacy will be she genuinely cared about the students of Darlington County and about the future they built for themselves while they were in Darlington County schools.

RETURN TO TOC

"It feels good to know I contribute to improvements in students', families' and staff lives."

Debra Holmes
March 2026 Civility Ambassador
Hampton County School District



Photo 1: *Secretary-Treasurer of the Richland One School District Board of School Commissioners Dr. Ericka R. Hursey* • **Photo 2:** *(from left) SCSBA Region 4 Director and Horry County Schools board member Tracy Winters and fellow board members Pam Dawson and David Koch with SCSBA Executive Director Scott Price* • **Photo 3:** *September 2025 Civility Ambassador Naomi Eckels of Bamberg County School District*

Calhoun's Nelson: At the Heart of It All

Two hearts converged more than 52 years ago at a community center in the heart of the Sandy Run community, nestled within the heart of Calhoun County and South Carolina's Midlands region. One of those hearts belonged to Ned Nelson, who now represents District 4, encompassing the small town of St. Matthews, on the Calhoun County School District (CCSD) Board of Trustees.

On Jan. 8, 2027, Nelson and his wife, Marge, will celebrate their golden anniversary and the union from which so much good followed. His parents, a Boy Scout leader and several teachers helped shape Nelson, but the woman who has held his heart all these years inspired him to become an educator.

"She knew I had been an indifferent student in grade school, but she sincerely believed I could do better academically," Nelson said. "She pushed me gently but firmly to do whatever it took to get into college."

Unlike his brothers, who knew early in life what they wanted to become, Nelson did not. In fact, he admits he never tried very hard and needed constant encouragement.

"As a child and young adult, I tried to think ahead and plan my life, but it just didn't work," he said. "So, around the time I was 17 or 18 years old, I gave it to our Heavenly Father to handle for me, and it worked."

"I truly believe the Lord brought us together that evening because it was His plan for our lives to be together."

His journey toward becoming an educator began at the Calhoun County Purple Martin Festival at the Sandy Run Community Center. Marge, a rising sophomore at Winthrop College, had been dragged to the dance by her parents. By the end of the night, she was having dinner with Nelson in Columbia.

"Those events took place in May 1974. We married on Jan. 8, 1977, three weeks after Marge graduated from Winthrop College," Nelson said. "I truly believe the Lord brought us together that evening because it was His plan for our lives to be together."



Marge became a teacher while Nelson worked for Carolina Eastman, the first major industry in Calhoun County and, by many accounts, the source of some of the state's highest-paying jobs. Nelson could easily envision spending his entire career there.

"When we got married, I had been employed at Eastman for four years and was doing well there," he said. "I felt lucky to have a job at a very good company where the pay and fringe benefits were very good. As far as I was concerned, I was going to stay there all my working life."

Marge envisioned something different for him. She encouraged Nelson to pursue college despite his doubts about being accepted because of his poor academic performance.

Going to college also meant leaving a good job with a promising future to pursue what Nelson considered an impossible and completely foolish endeavor.

Nelson earned his bachelor's degree in three years and joined CCSD. During his 29-year career,

he served as a middle school science teacher, elementary school physical education teacher, high school football coach, assistant principal, principal and, finally, director of operations and athletics at the district level. Along the way, he earned a master's degree in education administration from UofSC.

After becoming a principal, Nelson had the privilege of singing in a choir with one of the teachers who had made a lasting impact on his life. He has never forgotten what she told him after a rehearsal.

"Of all my students, in all my years, I am most proud of you," she said.

As for Marge, Nelson said she made it all possible by having faith in him and working as a teacher to support their family while he attended college.

"I would not be where I am today if I had not stopped at the Sandy Run Community Center on that Saturday evening in May 1974," he said.

Marge invested nearly her entire teaching career in the district. She retired in 2004, then returned to work part time as a reading and literacy coach for five more years.

Nelson was the son of a department supervisor at the State Record Newspaper and World War II veteran and a homemaker. His family came to Calhoun County from the capital city of Columbia when he was young. Today, he encourages young people "to never underestimate their ability to achieve what may seem to them at any time in their life to be an impossible task or dream."

After the family moved to Calhoun County, Nelson's father cleared some of their land and purchased several farm animals, including cows, hogs, chickens and a horse. The family planted a large garden, collected eggs and kept a milk cow, which provided plenty of fresh, raw milk. Nelson believed the property was a dream come true for his father, who was not a farmer but found fulfillment in trying to become one.

Even Nelson's mother went to work for CCSD as a classified employee after becoming an empty nester.

"She didn't need to work," Nelson said. "She just wanted to do something useful and fulfilling."

Perhaps the same longing for useful and fulfilling work led Nelson back to education as a school board member after his retirement.

"I missed being connected in some way with my profession to which I had dedicated 29 years of my life. I decided to offer for election in 2012, and I've been fortunate to have been elected several times since then," Nelson said. "I firmly believe public education is one of the cornerstones of a prospering society."

Nelson was a student during what he calls the "so-called separate but equal days" and graduated from St. Matthews High School on the heels of court-ordered integration. Those experiences helped shape his enduring belief in public education, which he calls one of society's greatest foundations. Though saddened by the recent challenges facing public education, he remains hopeful. Just as in days past, he believes what is right and equal will prevail.

Nelson and Marge are the parents of Kate, who is married to Jeret. Both are UofSC alumni.

RETURN TO TOC

"We find common ground, which is our students, faculty and staff,"

Michelle Goodwin-Calwile
July 2026 Civility Ambassador
Greenville County Schools

Cherokee's Sarratt Jr.: The Influence of a Compound Community

The Sarratt name in Cherokee County, specifically in Gaffney, is a significant one. From Sarratt's Creek to the marker where the Sarratt House, a historic Queen Anne home of a prominent local merchant, once stood, the town is filled with references to one of three variations of the name. Cherokee County School District Board Vice Chair and District 2 Representative Johnny Sarratt Jr. inherited his name from his father.

"My father is a very demanding and detail-oriented man," Sarratt said. "Many of the things he's said to me over the years have stuck in my mind. We still talk three to four times a week."

With 30 years of work at Winn-Dixie and 17 years of service to Cherokee County School District, Johnny Sr. had much to offer his son, including the Giving Back Organization (GBO), a nonprofit he founded in 1995.

His immediate and extended family also were sources of community for Johnny Jr.

"My dad's family owned almost 100 acres of land, and that's where our house was located," he said. "So, my grandparents were very close to me, and I spent a lot of time with them. Also, many of my aunts, uncles and cousins."

As for his service on the school board, his predecessor, Willie Crosby, approached him about running. Crosby had represented District 2 on the board for 16 years. Now in his 14th year of service, Johnny Jr. plans to hang up his hat when his term ends in 2028.

"If you're still there, then God has you in that position for a reason," Sarratt said.

"Many people have so much turmoil going on in their life. They're dealing with health issues, financial problems, home, work … to where they are falling apart, but also holding it together by the grace of God."



And if he didn't have enough mentors and people who saw his potential, there was Rev. Dr. Michael Bridges, who taught him the ways of God and ultimately led him to the pastorate through another pastoral acquaintance.

"They are a very loving and praying congregation, who keeps their faith in the Lord," he said.

When it came to encouragement, Sarratt Jr. credits his mother.

"My mother was strict, but also nurturing," he said. "I thank God for the parents he blessed me to have."

Though he credits many people with shaping him into the man he is today, he gives God the honor. His mantra can best be described by one of his recent sermon titles, "Holding It Together, While Falling Apart."

"Many people have so much turmoil going on in their life," Sarratt said. "They're dealing with health issues, financial problems, home, work … to where

they are falling apart, but also holding it together by the grace of God."

The students of Cherokee County School District benefit from his service on the board in various ways. The most profound include the building of the new Center for Advanced Technical Studies (CATS), one-to-one computing for each student and block scheduling at the high schools.

"The one-to-one has probably been the most impactful to the students and staff, so that would be the most meaningful to me," Sarratt said.

He and his wife, Kendra, have served their community and congregation for quite some time. He has served on the board since his children were 7 and 1. The youngest is now in high school.

"We've made many sacrifices over the years, but they have been the driving force behind what I do," Sarratt said. "I'm going to cherish the next few years because time is one thing we can't get back."

As a district, Sarratt said he would like to see continued improvement in all areas, especially academically.

Fellow board members describe Sarratt Jr. as someone who gives anonymously, serves without fanfare and can frequently be found supporting important activities within the schools.

RETURN TO TOC

"I missed being connected in some way with my profession to which I had dedicated 29 years of my life. I decided to offer for election in 2012, and I've been fortunate to have been elected several times since then. I firmly believe public education is one of the cornerstones of a prospering society."

Ned Nelson
September 2026 Civility Ambassador
Calhoun County School District

SCSBA

"Civility is a credential of the civilized, but an enigma for the uncouth."

Rev. Dr. Ralph Canty
February 2026 Civility Ambassador
Sumter School District

CIVILITY AMBASSADOR SPOTLIGHT

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