Former professor’s generosity helps student cross the finish line

Like many other students, Geneda Parker worried about how she would manage her last semester of graduate school as a student teacher while supporting herself financially. When she found out she had received the Virginia Arnold Scholarship, she was relieved — she knew she could now focus all her energy on her teaching and on making a positive impact on her students. As a result of her dedication and hard work, she was able to finish her student teaching internship early and was offered a full-time teaching position.

Parker is currently teaching first grade at Broad Rock Elementary School in Richmond Public Schools. She attributes much of her success to those who have helped her along the way, from professors to Dr. Virginia Arnold, whose generosity helped Parker finish her last year at VCU.

“I consider myself lucky to have been chosen for this award and I am extremely thankful for how it has affected my career,” Parker said. “Thank you, Dr. Arnold, for seeing the best in me. Thank you for being so kindhearted, giving and selfless, and for believing in my future. I will continue to make you proud, represent VCU and hold your scholarship in the highest esteem — you can count on that!”

Arnold, a former faculty member often considered an honorary alumnus thanks to her dedication to the School of Education, began teaching at the school in the 1970s. It was later on, returning to Richmond after opening a successful publishing consultancy in New York City, that she decided to support education students through scholarship funding.

Having come from a big family with limited resources and knowing the struggle of working two jobs to get through school, Arnold believes that this type of support can make a great impact on the lives of students.

“The most important thing you will ever do is get an education, and I want students from all walks of life to have that opportunity,” Arnold said. “I hold my scholarship recipients to high standards because I believe we need the smartest people in the world to become teachers.”

Arnold encourages all alumni and friends of the School of Education to contribute and help support the school’s mission.

“If each of us gave $50 a year, imagine how many students could see their dreams come true. Students need our help today more than ever before, and future teachers are a great investment,” Arnold said. “If we don’t have teachers, we don’t have schools and we won’t have a future.”

Dear VCU School of Education alumni and friends,

During the 2014-2015 academic year, we celebrated 50 years of VCU School of Education’s leadership, innovative educator preparation and active community service in Richmond and beyond.

I am proud to say that, over the last half-century, our faculty, staff and students have worked at the local and national level to address many of the issues that are relevant in public education. We prepare teachers, counselors and administrators to work on high-needs schools. In addition, we developed our affiliated centers in response to the need to understand the science behind our practice.

This year-long commemoration gave us an opportunity to reflect on our accomplishments, expand our thinking through lectures and thank our stakeholders, including alumni. Many of our 19,000 graduates have held key leadership positions in urban and other challenging learning communities. They have served with distinction; won numerous professional, teaching and research awards; and are recognized both nationally and internationally.

This year has also given us a chance to look ahead at ways to continue to be a vibrant leader in public education and the scholarship of children and their families.

In the U.S., more than 2,200 colleges, universities and organizations prepare educators and leaders. The new rankings by U.S. News & World Report of the top graduate programs list the VCU School of Education as the 17th-best public graduate school in the country and the 27th-best overall program. We value this ranking and recognize the contributions of our students, alumni, faculty and friends in helping us achieve this recognition.

At the VCU School of Education, we will continue to dedicate our work to children and youth who need us most. Thank you again for all your support and here’s to another 50 years of leadership and innovation!

Best,

Christine S. Walther-Thomas, Ph.D.
Dean, VCU School of Education
The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education (SOE) marked its 50th anniversary during the 2014-2015 academic year with special events, guest lectures and fundraising for the 50th Anniversary Urban Education Scholarship. The events and lectures were planned by the SOE faculty and the 50th Anniversary Steering Committee.

The VCU School of Education’s 50th anniversary celebration year launched on Sept. 25, 2014, with a reception at the Library of Virginia. The reception included two informative presentations: one on the history of the school and its contributions from the VCU School of Education, with university President Michael Rao, Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton and Dean Chriss Walther-Thomas commending all SOE community members for their many contributions through teaching, research and service to the school, the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond.

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On Oct. 13, 2014, the School of Education welcomed paleontologist Jack Horner as the speaker for the 13th Annual Ruth Harris Lecture in Paleoskies. Horner struggled through an important early childhood learning disability that led to the discovery of the first dinosaur eggs in the Western Hemisphere. Horner used what he found out that he has dyslexia. Though he was told “I’ll fail,” Horner was able to overcome related problems, conduct significant field research and demonstrate the value of finding, outside the box.

On Feb. 10, 2015, as part of Black History Month, VCU hosted ACLU Racial Justice Program Director Dennis Parker for the 13th Annual Black History Month Lecture on Feb. 10, 2015, as part of Black History Month. He outlined current policies that are discriminatory and fail to reduce crime to a crowd of more than 200 students, faculty and community members.

Dr. Marilyn Cochran-Smith, an internationally known researcher in the field of teacher education, on Jan. 26, 2015, as part of its annual Research Colloquium. The event focused on education research aimed at preparing teachers to work in urban schools. Dr. Cochran-Smith is the Cawthorne Professor of Teacher Education for Urban Schools and also the director of the Boston College Lynch School of Education’s doctoral program in curriculum and instruction.

Dr. Rosemary Caffarella was the guest speaker for the School of Education’s Adult Learning Lecture on Nov. 12, 2014. She discussed three different teaching techniques (experiential learning, transformative learning, and culture teaching) and shared methods and share best practices.

In collaboration with VCU Libraries, the School of Education hosted VCU Racial Justice Program Director Donna Parker for the 14th Annual Black History Month Lecture on Feb. 13, 2015. This lecture, titled “Still Separate, Still Unequal” addressed topics such as the lack of resources for urban schools, racially segregated schools, the struggle in inner-city public and non-public schools and the need for cross-cultural understanding. Parker also discussed how students can be under-researched here less experienced teachers and to teach in areas with higher poverty concentrations or—factors that lead to low graduation rates. She also discussed mental and related programs and ways to encourage diversity and share resources and tips for educating students and raising awareness of this serious problem.

In an interactive discussion on suicide prevention in schools and shared her own experience of losing her brother to suicide. The topic is one of connections as well as alternative ways to encourage suicide prevention, such as studying “Romeo and Juliet” in English classes. She spoke to the importance of counselors as well as alternative ways to encourage suicide prevention, such as studying “Romeo and Juliet” in English classes.

Erin O’Malley spoke at the annual John Cook Lecture on Nov. 10, 2014. O’Malley led an interactive discussion on suicide prevention in schools and shared her own experience of losing her brother to suicide. The topic is one of connections as well as alternative ways to encourage suicide prevention, such as studying “Romeo and Juliet” in English classes.

On Oct. 22, 2014, VCU President Michael Rao welcomed Dean Chriss Walther-Thomas, faculty members and student leaders in the School of Education to the annual Virginia Legislative Breakfast. More than 250 alumni, donors, faculty, staff, state and local legislators, students and friends in attendance. VCU President Michael Rao, Virginia Secretary of Education Anne Holton and Dean Chriss Walther-Thomas commended all SOE community members for their many contributions through teaching, research and service to the school, the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond.

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The 50th anniversary matching gift challenge to support new urban education scholarship

In celebration of the VCU School of Education’s 50th anniversary this year, an anonymous supporter has generously offered a $50,000 matching gift if we raise $50,000 by June 30, 2015. All gifts will go towards establishing a new endowed scholarship: the 50th Anniversary Urban Education Scholarship.

As an example, a $100 gift will be matched with an additional $100. A possible combined total of $100,000 enables us to create a scholarship that supports promising students in the School of Education who seek careers that improve educational opportunities in urban schools and other high-need environments.

Each year, more than 50 VCU School of Education students are awarded scholarships that enable them to pursue their dreams of becoming teachers, counselors or school administrators. Scholarships are making a real difference in the lives of our students. Here’s what J.J., a future mathematics teacher, had to say about the impact of his School of Education scholarship:

“When I’m not in school, I’m usually working … I hope that as I continue my studies and enter the field, I can make you proud of the person you so graciously helped.”

To contribute to the Urban Education Scholarship or other scholarships in the VCU School of Education, please visit: www.soe.vcu.edu/giving/.

50th Anniversary Steering Committee members

- Coronda Lee: Administrative Assistant, Research and Faculty Development
- Jackie McDonough: Associate Professor, Department of Teaching and Learning
- Geri McInerney: Assistant to the Dean
- Judith McKinney: Specialist, Virginia Department of Education
- Jessa Nelson: Development Assistant, External Relations and Development
- Fred Orelowe: Professor Emeritus, Department of Special Education and Disability Policy
- Maikie Philipsen: Professor, Department of Foundations of Education
- Evelyn Reed: Associate Professor, Department of Special Education and Disability Policy
- Donna Sharits: Director of Annual Giving and Alumni Engagement
- Diane Simon: Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs
- Stefani Thachik: Graduate Research Assistant, Department of Teaching and Learning
- Vicki White: Member, School of Education Advancement Council

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- Dianne Smith

--- MEMENTO SPRING 2015 ---

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Christine S. Walther-Thomas, Dean

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