



Women Education Leaders in Virginia Fall 2011



October 30, 2011 Vol. 1, Issue 3

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President's Message

Dear WELV Members,

In this third edition of our newsletter, we highlight educational leadership in action and the challenges faced in the aftermath of a natural disaster in Louisa County. We also feature member profiles for a superintendent and a graduate student who are using their leadership skills to make a difference for others. We are proud of our members and the many ways they impact their communities throughout Virginia.

It is important to remember that each one of us is a LEADER. Therefore, challenge yourself and try new things which will promote life-long learning. Empower others to achieve their goals by providing support and encouragement. Finally, reflect your personal values in everything you do and say.

Regardless of the season, be the best you can be!

Sincerely,
Paula C. Lichiello
WELV President

Feature Article



Picking Up the Pieces in Louisa County: An Interview with Dr. Deborah Pettit

Regardless of where you were in Virginia on Tuesday, August 23, 2011, you most likely experienced one of the most powerful earthquakes ever felt in the state as it rippled from its epicenter in Louisa County and continued throughout the eastern United States. Records indicate the 15-second tremor measured 5.8 on the Richter scale at 1:51 p.m. that Tuesday afternoon as it prompted building evacuations, temporarily disrupted cell phone service, and triggered two nuclear reactors near the center of the quake to shut down without damage.

While many of us quickly returned to our everyday lives, this was not the case for Dr. Deborah Pettit, Superintendent of Louisa County Schools, and the faculty, staff, and students in this school division. Dr. Pettit recently provided candid answers to the questions below which show how powerful educational leadership can be in the aftermath of a natural disaster.

(Continued on Page 5)



SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

Each quarterly newsletter will feature a profile of a Virginia superintendent. In this issue, we are pleased to feature a 2011 annual conference panel member.

Name: Dr. Bobbi Johnson

Current job title and location:
 Superintendent, Culpeper
 County Public Schools,
 Culpeper, Virginia



Education: Lynchburg College BA 1981, Lynchburg
 College M.Ed. 1993, University of Virginia Ed. D. 2002

WELV Member: since 2011

What led you to select a career in education? I cannot remember a time when I didn't want to be an educator. I loved everything about school as a child and wanted to have a career in the environment that I enjoyed. Of course, I learned early on that playing school every afternoon and teaching school are two very, very different things. I enjoyed the freedom to develop lessons that could best reach my students, but also appreciated having a road map to guide my instruction. I did not realize when I first became a teacher how much I would enjoy collaborating with other teachers. And let's face it, kids are hilarious!

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STUDENT PROFILE

Each quarterly newsletter will feature a profile of a WELV graduate student. In this issue, we are pleased to feature a 2011 annual conference panel member.

Name: Kimberly Dixon Ferguson

Current job title and location:
 Assistant Director for Conference
 Services, University of Virginia,
 Charlottesville, VA

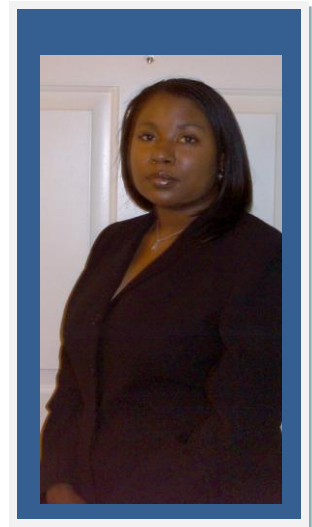
Education: Currently a Doctoral
 Candidate, pursuing Ed.D. in
 Educational Leadership, at Liberty
 University; Master of Tourism
 Administration (Concentrations in
 Events and Sports Management)
 from The George Washington
 University School of Business
 (2006); Bachelor of Arts in Sociology
 from The University of Virginia
 (2000)

WELV Member: Since April 2009

What led you to select a career in education? My mother is a teacher and always told me I had a gift for

leading and influencing others. She suggested a career in teaching early on, but I resisted for a while. After working in event planning for many years, I began teaching on a volunteer basis, mostly teaching event management courses for individuals that were seeking a career change or young adults wanting to break into the field. I also found opportunities in jobs to develop training and professional development programs for our student staff, which truly gave me joy as I watched these young people develop and grow. After completing my master's degree, I decided to continue my education and pursue a graduate degree in education so that I might prepare myself to one day work in an administrative position in higher education and be in a better

position to be of service to those individuals who may need extra support to successfully complete college. *(Continued on Page 4)*



Kimberly Dixon Ferguson currently serves as WELV's secretary.

Superintendent Profile – Dr. Bobbi Johnson *(Continued from page 2)*

I decided to become an administrator after teaching for ten years. I had not grown weary of teaching, but had begun to think of other ways I could make an impact on students. I followed the natural progression of building level teacher leader, principal, director, assistant superintendent, and now superintendent. I never had a long range goal of becoming a superintendent. Life just evolved, and I have been very fortunate to have been given great opportunities.

What is the most rewarding part of your current job/position? The most rewarding part of my position is to see an entire division begin to follow the path of a shared vision. It is like an ocean liner that can't make sudden turns, but can steadily change its course. I have a couple of tenets that are paramount in my decision making. I believe we must not just have rigorous opportunities for students, but we must be active in supporting and informing students of what we have to offer. We cannot be one of the barriers our students face when seeking advancement. I also believe we have to stay in touch with what the world is demanding of our students and adjust our expectations and requirements to these demands. And finally, we must make sure our students leave us with a plan for what comes next and with the skills to be successful. As I begin to see these tenets as the foundation for policy and practice and as a part of everyday conversations throughout the division, I feel a pride and excitement that is indescribable.

What accomplishment are you most proud of? I'm pretty proud of being married for 33 years and of being the mom of four incredible daughters. Professionally, I'm proud of my ability to continue to learn and get better at what I do. I'm also very proud of the educators I have had the good fortune to help mentor over the years. I continue to be thrilled as they add to their list of accomplishments.

What are some of your hobbies? I enjoy reading, watching movies, and going to the beach with family. I always feel pretty boring when I have to answer this question and vow to get some really cool hobbies before I'm asked the question again.

What is your favorite quote? My favorite quotes change from time to time, but I can always count on Maya Angelou to write something that matches my place in that moment. I came across this quote as I was preparing to leave my childhood community to take on the superintendency of Culpeper.

"Stepping onto a brand-new path is difficult, but not more difficult than remaining in a situation, which is not nurturing to the whole woman." - Maya Angelou .

Is there any other information you would like to share? I appreciate the work of WELV in supporting and promoting women leaders in education.

2011-2012 Meeting Calendar

Board and Planning Committee meetings are currently held at UVA's Zehmer Hall, 104 Midmont Lane, Charlottesville VA, Room C. Call 1-209-647-1075 to join by phone. Then key in the participant access code which is 650804#.

Meeting dates:	Dec. 9, Jan. 27, Feb. 24
Meeting times:	3pm - 4pm Board of Directors Meeting 4pm - 5pm Conference Planning Committee Meeting



Student Profile- Kimberly Ferguson *(continued from page 2)*

What is the most rewarding part of your current job/position? I enjoy working with our young staff of planners and helping them to grow personally and professionally. I try to offer them the benefit of my experience and knowledge, while at the same time pushing them to not be afraid to try new things. Additionally, each year we hire 15-20 college students to support our conference operation, and I enjoy having the opportunity to develop training programs for them and serving as a resource for them both during their summer employment with us and beyond.

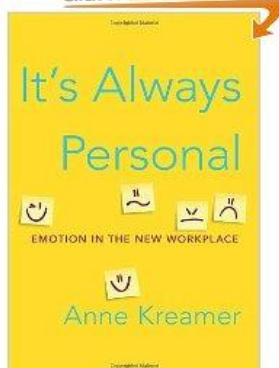
What accomplishment are you most proud of? I think it is vital to have a good mentor in your life that is able to provide support, guidance, and maybe even a little tough love if need, to be by your side as you pursue your goals and dreams. I am blessed to have several awesome mentors past and present, and I strive to follow that example and pay it forward by serving as a mentor to other young women whenever possible. Through my positions at UVA, I've had the opportunity to work with many amazing young women and have stayed connected to several over the years. My proudest moment came when one of my mentees that had long since "left the nest" looked me up two years ago to reconnect. In our conversation, she shared with me the many things she'd gone on to accomplish and how much she valued the time she spent at UVA. She later revealed that she was engaged to be married and asked me to serve as the officiant for her wedding, which I happily accepted! I share this story because I believe that it is not always the grand gestures that truly impact others, rather it's the small things you do each day to let someone know how much they are valued and worthy that will be remembered. It's not often that you really get an opportunity to hear how your actions impact another person, but when you do, and it's something positive, you cannot help but feel humbled and blessed by the experience.

What are some of your hobbies? Although currently most of my time is confined to my dissertation, I do enjoy writing fiction and poetry; I love movies from the 1980s; and I'm trying to become a better cook by experimenting with new recipes in my spare time.

What is your favorite quote? *"Be the change you wish to see in the world"* – Gandhi.

Is there any other information you would like to share? WELV has been an invaluable resource to me. My membership in this organization has done so much to help me grow and develop professionally, intellectually, and socially. I've learned so much from all the women I've had the opportunity to meet and definitely encourage any woman interested in education to join today.

Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**



It's Always Personal: Emotion in the New Workplace will be discussed at the 2011 Virginia ASCD annual conference by a WELV panel.

With women now the majority of the workforce and the lines between office and personal life blurring as never before, the dynamics of work have shifted profoundly. ***It's Always Personal*** combines the latest information on the intricacies of the human brain, candid stories from employees, and the surprising results of two new national surveys, reported here for the first time, which reached out to workers from all walks of life about their emotions on the job.

Next newsletter: January 2012

Picking Up the Pieces in Louisa County: An Interview with Dr. Deborah Pettit

(Continued from page 2)

Question: How did you deal with issues related to the safety of your students in the schools that afternoon?

Immediately following the earthquake, we had limited communication with all of our schools, so my first challenge was determining whether students and staff were injured. We sent Central Office staff members to each school to make this determination while the Director of Transportation began contacting bus drivers to report to schools. We were most fortunate to have very few injuries considering the damage in our schools. Students actually left schools only a few minutes later than their usual time of departure, and we were able to send out a phone message to parents to advise them even though it took a while to gain access to a phone line to distribute the message.

Later that evening and for the next week, I personally sent out a phone message to inform parents and staff regarding school closures and the status of injuries and damages. I believe that keeping parents informed from the beginning contributed to their eventual positive response regarding the abbreviated school schedule we are using for the middle and high schools.

Question: What was the biggest challenge you faced as school superintendent after the earthquake occurred?

My greatest challenge was to find space for 2000 of our 4500 students as we lost the use of two schools in a thirty-second time span.

Question: Once you and your team realized the severe damage to the high school and one elementary school, what steps did you take to make the decisions regarding where those students would attend school?

We closed the entire school division for 2 days following the earthquake to allow employees time to assess and deal with damages at their homes and for us to determine which buildings could be used. However, we asked all principals, assistant principals and central office staff (approximately 30 individuals who comprise our administrative team) to meet at the middle school at 9:00 a.m. the day after the quake (Wednesday) to begin to determine the next steps.

The middle school library was the only safe and organized place that we had to meet at that time as the Central Office building had sustained damage in terms of overturned bookcases and filing cabinets, so offices were in disarray. For the next two days, this incredible group of educators brainstormed numerous scenarios, contacting other school divisions for available buildings and scheduling options, to figure out how to start school again in Louisa County. I was a part of this process as well as I contacted Dr. Wright about waivers, clock hours, and advice as well as neighboring superintendents about vacant school buildings.

In addition, my administrative team spent four hours on that Wednesday afternoon moving all high school students' book bags and personal belongings from classrooms to the front hallway, so we could distribute them as soon as possible because students and parents were desperate for cell phones and car keys. Although we were exhausted emotionally and physically, we shared a commitment to get back to normal as soon as possible which meant getting students back to school as soon as possible. The earthquake happened on Tuesday and by Thursday afternoon, with many hours of brainstorming, we had a plan and brought teachers to the middle school on Friday to share the plans for re-starting school. At that time, we hoped to begin within a week- the day after Labor Day.

I knew that we would be successful when our teachers responded to our plan with cheers and a standing ovation. Who could ask for a more committed staff? That is loyalty at its best. I hailed them as heroes because they made sure that our students were evacuated safely and now they were going to provide a world-class education under less than optimal circumstances.

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Please visit WELV.org for conference and membership information

Picking Up the Pieces in Louisa County: An Interview with Dr. Deborah Pettit

(Continued from page 5)

Question: Now that you have experienced several weeks of the high school students sharing the middle school and high school students attending on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and the middle school students attending on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, how is that plan working?

The plan with the alternating day schedule for middle and high school students is working well. On the first Saturday for middle-schoolers, attendance was good. Students returned to school as if they had never missed a day. We continue to make plans for providing middle school students opportunities for receiving support from teachers including teachers being available for assistance on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at local fire departments and churches throughout the county.

Question: What is the biggest lesson regarding your leadership that you learned from dealing with this natural disaster?

I learned that successful leadership demands teamwork – one cannot lead alone or in a vacuum. I am fortunate to have a bright, hard-working, dedicated group of administrators who never gave up searching for a way to make school happen again in Louisa. We trusted each other enough to challenge each other's ideas as well as to blend those ideas into something new without concern for who would get the credit or the blame. In turn, teachers and other staff members trusted the administrators enough to make the plans actually work.

Question: What did you encounter in managing this situation that surprised you?

The entire situation has been so extraordinary that much of it has been a surprise or at least a new experience in which I continue to learn daily. In some ways, the media attention is very new for me. However, individuals from the media have been most respectful and have helped me to gain a level of comfort and confidence in front of a camera.

Please see [Video](#) for additional information.



Event Calendar

2012 Annual Conference: 'Performance...at Center Stage'

March 22-23, 2012

Doubletree Hotel, Charlottesville, VA

Speakers: Dr. Teresa Sullivan (invited), Dr. Belle Wheelan, SACS, Patty Culotta, Noelle Ellerson, AASA



3rd Annual Regional Forum *(in collaboration with Lynchburg College, Randolph College and Sweet Briar College)*

Randolph College, Lynchburg, VA

Saturday, March 3, 2012

8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Speaker: Ann O'Toole, retired Principal from Robius Elementary School, Chesterfield County