

Make New Friends, but Keep the Old



(L-R) Joab Cotton, Gloria Hemphill presented plaques from Rudy Wright, Mayor of Hickory

Board Members Retire, New Faces Take Oath

An evening of heartfelt appreciation and bitter-sweet farewells clearly dominated the December 5th meeting of the Board of Education, Hickory Public Schools. As Joab Cotton and Gloria Hemphill, two dedicated members of the HPS board, took their seats for the opening of the meeting, they realized that shortly thereafter -- they would be stepping down as newly elected members were administered the oath of office. Both were retiring from the board.

Joab Cotton, who served as chairman of the board for the past two years and vice chairman for eight years prior, dedicated a total of 16 years as a board volunteer. His tenure encompassed every aspect of education—from hiring new superintendents to leading board decisions with regards to dress code for both high school and middle school students. Renovations, construction of new schools, the establishment of the International Baccalaureate Program at Hickory High School, the kick-off of the Hickory Career and Arts Magnet High School—are just a sampling of the multiple projects initiated under Cotton’s helm.

“You have a great bunch of people on this board—they are strong advocates for our students,” said Cotton, as he addressed the public in attendance. “It doesn’t matter what you have or what you don’t have, what matters is

the welfare and future of our students. Roll your sleeves up and carry no agendas. Keep going forward and work together—as you already know how to do,” he said.

And working right by Cotton’s side as the board’s vice chair was Gloria Hemphill, who also stepped down during the meeting, following her board service for the past 14 years. “The best things in life—are relationships,” said Hemphill. “I’ve built a great one over the years,” she said. “This board is going to be fine. You will always sleep well if you base your decisions on the needs of the child.”

Several special guests attended the meeting to present awards and recognize the outgoing board members, including: Sarah Talbert, past president, HPS Board of Directors, who recognized both Cotton and Hemphill for their loyalty to the schools and their leadership, and in addition, Talbert surprised Cotton was the prestigious Old North State Award from Governor Purdue; Rudy Wright, Mayor of Hickory, awarded plaques to both retiring board members, proclaiming March 2, 2012 which is “Read Across America Day”—as Hickory’s Gloria Hemphill Day for her service in reading with children and he claimed December 5th, 2011 as Joab Cotton Day—for Cotton’s leadership as chairman of the Board of Education; Chief Tom Adkins, Hickory Police Department, presented plaques and Hickory Police Night Sticks to both retiring members; Dr. Duane Kirkman, past superintendent, Hickory Public Schools, addressed each of the retiring board members—thanking them for their professional commitment and long-term service; Dr. Sherry Willis, principal of Southwest Elementary, provided special awards to Hemphill from the staff and students of Southwest; Viewmont Elementary School presented a beautiful gift basket to Cotton for his service and leadership; and the remaining board members, Angela Beaver Simmons, Reginald Hamilton, Charlotte Williams, Sallie Johnson and Margaret Pope, collectively presented framed certificates of appreciation to Cotton and Hemphill.

Following the presentations, Chief District Court Judge, Burford Cherry, who serves the 25th Judicial District, administered the oath of office to the recently elected board members, including: Charlotte Williams, member-at-large, who is serving her second term on the board; Margaret Pope, who previously filled Vanessa Linebarger’s remaining term for Ward 4 and was elected to represent Ward 4; Amy Monroe, Ward 6, who will represent this Ward vacated with Joab Cotton’s retirement; and Reverend T. Anthony Spearman, Ward 3, who was selected by the board to fill Gloria Hemphill’s remaining two years on her term, Ward 3, following her retirement, as well.

With the retirement of Cotton and Hemphill, the meeting also included the board’s vote for a new chairperson and vice-chairperson. Angela Beaver Simmons, who represents Ward 1, was unanimously voted by her fellow board members to serve as the new chairperson and Reginald Hamilton, who represents Ward 5, was unanimously voted by his fellow board members to serve as the new vice-chairperson.

The new calendar year kicks off with HPS Board of Education meetings on January 9th, 5:30 PM at the HPS Administrative Services Building and January 23, 7:00 PM at Hickory City Hall.



Hemphill, Cotton



Sarah Talbert



Cotton, Hemphill, Chief Atkins



Dr. Willis, Gloria Hemphill



Reginald Hamilton presents certificates on behalf of board



Joab Cotton, Gloria Hemphill, Reginald Hamilton, Angela B. Simmons, Sallie Johnson, Margaret Pope, and Charlotte Williams



Rev. T. Anthony Spearman taking Oath of Office



Margaret Pope taking Oath of Office.



Amy Monroe taking Oath of Office.



Charlotte Williams taking Oath of Office.

Congratulations to all!