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✓ DeKalb's King awards go to educator, grocery chain

Like the humanitarian whose life and teachings were honored by a national holiday Monday, Gresham Park Elementary School Principal Wendolyn Norris has a dream.

"My vision is that schools can no longer operate as entities apart from the whole community," she says. "In order for our schools to be better, we must improve our communities."

To help improve the Gresham Park school and community, Norris has knocked on parents' doors to solicit their ideas and assistance, recruited grandmothers from area churches and successfully lobbied for DeKalb County's first innovative technology center, designed to encourage parents and children to learn together.

DeKalb College recognized Norris' efforts by presenting her with its Martin Luther King Jr. 1997 Humanitarian Award during its annual celebration of King's birthday last week at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at Chapel Hill Harvester in Decatur.

The college also presented the award to Kroger Food Stores for its involvement in community activities that enhance the wellness and education of children.

Filmmaker Spike Lee was the scheduled speaker for the event, which also included performances by the FireBrand Youth Choir, Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church Choir, and the DeKalb College Jazz Ensemble.

"These awards are given in recognition of an individual and a business that not only are building communities, but are creating a climate of community among those whose lives they touch," says Dr. Jacquelyn M. Belcher, DeKalb College president.

"The endeavors of Ms. Norris and Kroger go beyond what is normally expected; they've reached out to others in ways that are very personal.

"Of course," she adds, "in naming these awards in honor of Dr. King and presenting them on the anniversary of his birthday, DeKalb College also is paying homage to a man who set new standards for reaching out to others and created new codes for building community."

Kroger's community outreach efforts fall largely under its Krogering for Kids program, which includes raising funds for children's hospitals in areas where the grocery chain is located and providing nutrition, health and wellness seminars to schools as



Wendolyn Norris

well as involvement in Partners in Education; Can Hunger, and Special Needs programs.

"It's a great honor to be chosen," says Judy Burge, Kroger's manager of community activities, "especially with all the other corporations in Atlanta that do so much for the community. We're fortunate to be in a community where so many corporations are charitable-minded.

"It's part of Kroger's corporate mission, culture to give back to the community," Burge adds. "It just seems like the right thing to do. Sometimes you wonder if others notice what you're doing. For that reason, we appreciate DeKalb College's recognition."

Kroger has approximately 50 stores in the five-county metro Atlanta area.

Norris, an 11-year DeKalb county Schools employee who has been at Gresham Park since last June, feels that she is getting "big returns" on her efforts to create a parent-friendly community.

Parent involvement is way up, and incidents of littering and vandalism are significantly down.

Norris feels that the steps she has taken at Gresham Park, where approximately 500 children attend, are "ordinary."

"It seems like everyone should be doing this," she says.



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Gresham Teacher Of The Year Honored

Pepsi Cola officials joined with Gresham Elementary School to honor the school's Teacher of the Year, Jean Royal. Shown (l-r) are Dr. Walter Kimes, principal; Margie Hartley, chairperson;

Cynthia Coley, Pepsi Youth coordinator; Mrs. Royal; Roger Miller, Pepsi general manager; and Alex Chapin, Pepsi party manager.

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Pepsi Bottlers Honor Gresham Teacher Of Year

Gresham Park Elementary School said tribute to Jean Royal as Teacher of the Year.

Mrs. Royal is a twenty-year veteran teacher with the DeKalb County Board of Education. She received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from Winthrop College, Rock Hill South Carolina. She also holds a Masters in Education Degree from Georgia State University.

Mrs. Royal has taught second grade for 12 years and first grade for eight years.

Pepsi Cola, vice-president and general manager Roger Miller, Cynthia Coley, Pepsi's youth coordinator, along with Dr. Walter Larry Kimes, principal, presented Mrs. Royal with a gift symbolizing their appreciation for years of hard work and dedication to students.

History of Gresham Park Elementary School

Gresham Park Elementary School is located in the southwest sector of DeKalb County. The school was built in 1958. Like most schools in DeKalb County, during the late 1950s the school population was largely caucasian. By 1960, the school population had reached approximately 980 students. By the early 1970s the community's population has changed drastically. The school began a transition from a predominately white middle class community to a predominantly African-American middle- to lower-middle class with many one parent family units. As the community changed, the school's program experienced modification. With the change in the school there was an addition to the staff adding numerous specialists.

Family and community factors which impact students in the school include the following: a high percentage of students from families who receive public assistance; a large percentage of students who live in single parent homes with female heads of households; many who are being reared by grandparents, aunts, or other relatives; the young age of mothers coupled with a lack of parenting skills; the failure of parents to attain a high school diploma; the lack of employment opportunities; the high rate of unemployment; the lack of adequate recreational facilities; and a soaring crime rate.

Gresham Park enrolls a diverse student population drawing students from several economically disadvantaged areas. The student population began to decline during the early to middle 1980s. Presently the student population is about 475 students with 33 certified teachers, 12 auxiliary personnel, and one counselor, one instructional lead teacher, and a principal.

Gresham Park's children, destinations, and activities vary at the end of the school day. Some go home to parents, with part of that population being latch-key children. Others go to the homes of extended family members and neighbors or to day-care centers; Many are involved in after-school programs.

- The racial make-up is 99.3% African-American, .3% white, and .4% other. The pupil to teacher ratio is approximately 21 to 1 in lower grades Pre-K through 3rd; and 23 to 1 in upper grades 4th-6th.

- Eighty-three percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch.

- The dwelling type of the family is single family household 91.5%; mobile homes .2%; duplex .5%; and apartments 7.8%.

- During the 1995-96 school year, a large percent of students were suspended for class disturbance, fighting, rude and disrespectful behavior, profanity, and school disturbance.

- More than half the students tested in grades 1-6 were eligible to receive remedial assistance:

<u>Program</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
Remedial Reading	73.9	184
Remedial Math	77.9	194

● Less than 2% of the students were retained:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Number of Students</u>
K	3
1	5
2	1
3	1

Presently, there are approximately 475 students enrolled at Gresham Park. The school has undergone a change in administration. With this new administration has come many new programs, ideas, and changes. The building has undergone a major face lift. Many parents are bringing their children back to Gresham Park, which is their neighborhood school from the M-to-M program. Parental involvement has greatly increased. Community people are volunteering time and businesses are becoming more involved.

Parent involvement programs, honors programs, good citizenship awards and other incentives are provided to help motivate parents and students. The Family Technology Resource Center is being implemented to involve the side-by-side learning experience for parent and child. With this program, parents will have the opportunity to upgrade their skills which will generate job opportunities.

There are high hopes for Gresham Park, the community, the school and the students. Test scores are being directly targeted as well as student achievement and community involvement. Only through the efforts of all involved will our children succeed. Indeed, it takes a village.