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McArthur was leader in state education circles

WHEN LAURIN CURRIE MCARTHUR, JR., died April 4 at the age of 91, he left a legacy of exceptional service to the field of education in South Carolina and at Furman.

The vast majority of his working career was spent as an administrator in the South Carolina public schools, where, as his obituary stated, “He took great pride in organizing school systems, recruiting and developing bright and talented teachers and administrators, and enriching the lives of countless students.” He served as an assistant superintendent in Orangeburg County from 1950-53, superintendent of Beaufort School District One from 1953-59, and superintendent of Sumter School District Seventeen from 1959-74, when he retired from public school work.

At the time, Cyril Busbee, state superintendent of education, said, “We have 93 school districts in South Carolina. I wish we had 93 school superintendents like Currie McArthur.”

McArthur, a Navy veteran of World War II, served on an assortment of state, regional and national commissions. He chaired the South Carolina Education Association’s Blue Ribbon Committee on reorganization and the State Superintendent of Education Committee on Revision of Teacher Certificates in the 1960s. He was also actively involved in Presbyterian church work.

He was remembered fondly by colleagues in Sumter, where he was superintendent when schools were desegregated. The Sumter newspaper, *The Item*, reported that the desegregation plan McArthur oversaw was “hailed as a model by *The New York Times*” and quoted his former secretary, Julia S. Waters, as saying, “He was a strong leader for District Seventeen and introduced new levels of learning.”

In 1974, McArthur came to Furman to develop a school leadership program. Hazel Harris, his colleague in the education department, says, “He brought a tremendous amount of real world experience with him, and he laid the foundation for the program on which others were able to build.”

During his nine years on the faculty McArthur was well known for his outgoing personality, chatty nature and genteel manner. Nelly Hecker, current department chair, recalls one of her first conversations with McArthur after she arrived at Furman, in which he emphasized how important it was for her, as a new faculty member, to invest herself immediately in the work of the department.

“He had a fatherly way about him, but it wasn’t paternalistic,” she says. “He was very collegial, and mentoring was his strength.”

Lesley Quast, now an assistant dean at Furman, recalls McArthur’s sincerity and interest in others. “I never saw him in a bad mood,” she says. “He was very warm and courteous, the epitome of a Southern gentleman. He met my parents once when they visited, and after that he would never fail to ask me how they were doing. Those kinds of personal touches were typical of Currie.”

McArthur, who earned a doctorate from Columbia University, had a reputation as an exceptional conversationalist — but, as Hecker says, “He was also a great listener.” Harris says he was “full of stories and ideas” and recalls one discussion in particular which he began by telling her, “Anne [his wife] is going to call me in a little while, because sometimes I talk too much and Anne told me this morning that I shouldn’t keep you very long. So I told her to call me when she thought I should stop talking.”



“Sure enough,” Harris says, “Anne called after about an hour. Currie then asked me if I thought he’d talked too long, and I said no, not at all. So he told Anne, ‘I’m OK right now. Call me in another hour.’”

Harris adds, “Currie left quite a legacy, and Anne was a significant part of it.”

In addition to his wife, McArthur is survived by sons Laurin Currie McArthur III (Nancy) and John Barron McArthur (Barbara Howe McArthur ’80), daughter Sally McArthur Shigley ’79 (Ken ’73), six grandchildren, and a brother.

— JIM STEWART