

DETROIT LABOR PIONEER MARY

DFT President Emeritus, Mary Ellen Riordan, passed away Jan. 24. She was 89. Riordan was the first full-time president of the DFT. She was president from 1960 to 1981.

"The DFT and the American labor movement have lost a pioneer, a giant, and a champion for the rights of the American worker, particularly those in the education profession," DFT President Keith Johnson said. "President Riordan was the driving force for teachers in Michigan to collectively bargain."

Riordan was a science teacher at Crary Elementary School. As president, she led the first teacher union strike in Michigan history, which produced a two-year contract with a \$1,700 wage increase.



"President Riordan forged the template for all of the rights and benefits we as educators enjoy as well as many of the rights of other union workers," Johnson said.

As president she won a fight with the Detroit Education Association, an affiliate of the Michigan Education Association, to have the DFT as the sole bargaining agent for Detroit teachers.

Although Detroit teachers organized in 1931, it wasn't until 1965 that the legislature

adopted the Public Employees Relations Act, giving teachers and public employees the right to negotiate.

Riordan bargained the first contract in 1965, which was eight pages long. Two years later, the DFT and the Michigan Federation of Teachers co-sponsored the first "Racism in American Education" conference. The following year she oversaw the formation of the DFT's Committee Against Racism in Education (CARE), which staged a series of seminars and promoted Negro History Week programs in the schools.

"An AFT Vice President, Mary Ellen was on the forefront of teacher unionism when public sector organizing was first emerging," said David Hecker, AFT Michigan president. "She was an



outspoken leader and up to her passing, a fighter on many progressive issues. As a woman in a union world totally dominated by men she broke through that glass ceiling and, properly, put many men in their place. She led the way and opened up doors for many who followed."

In 2002, Riordan was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

"As passionate as she was about the rights and benefits of teachers, she never allowed us to lose sight of the fact that we, like President Riordan, were teachers first," Johnson said. "Everything she incorporated into the contracts she negotiated was designed to create the best environment for teachers to teach and for children to learn."

After her retirement, she did retirement counseling for Detroit teachers and chaired the DFT Retirees Chapter. She attended the most recent Retirees Chapter meeting on Jan. 19. Riordan died of heart failure in her sleep in her home at Henry Ford Village in Dearborn.

Retired teacher Richard Berlin picked her up for retirees meetings and took her to lunch afterward. On their recent drive, they talked about union issues and the last contract. Berlin told Riordan that people were saying she had memory loss and questioned her letter in support of the new contract.

"She laughed and said people should talk to her," Berlin said. "She was surprised they got this contract with as much good stuff and with as little loss as she expected." Members said she had great influence and called on a legion of leaders.

"She was labor leader par excellence," said Patrick Falcusan, DFT retirement counselor. "She knew everyone and everyone knew her."

"She taught me how to deal with people who had power and authority," said DFT President Emeritus John Elliott.

Jewel Gines, chair of the Retirees Chapter, said Riordan trained her by taking her on trips to Lansing.

"She was a little feisty," Gines said. "When she came to a retirees meeting, we almost always stood and applauded. She looked at all people the same. She didn't consider anybody was better than any-

ELLEN RIORDAN PASSES AWAY

one else.” Gines recalled that Riordan once won a Cadillac in a raffle.

“She was a humble person,” Gines said. “She said she couldn’t drive a Cadillac. She gave it back.”

Holley Sabotchick, DFT assistant to the president, has worked for the DFT for 42 years and is the keeper of the DFT archives.

“She was a well rounded person,” said Sabotchick. “She never, ever forgot she was a school teacher. When she had a story to tell,



she told it like she was in front of her class.”

A graduate of Marygrove College and Columbia University in New York, Riordan was married but lost her husband, Daniel, in World War II. She had no children and never remarried. She had a close relationship with her siblings and nieces and nephews.

“President Riordan leaves a tremendous legacy of commitment, accomplishment, and service to the children of Detroit and the American labor movement,” Johnson said, “and we are forever in her debt.”

When Berlin took her home Jan. 19, Riordan looked at him. “You’re my hero,” she told Berlin. She thanked him for taking her out to meetings and lunch.

“I thought,” Berlin said, “she’s been one of my heroes for a long time.”

Mary Ellen Inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame



Mary Ellen Riordan in Her Own Words

From the Walter P. Reuther Library Archives

On the Media

“One of our biggest things was to march on the Board of Education that had to be called off because it was set to really get rolling on Tuesday when President Kennedy was assassinated on Friday.

We did have our march two weeks later and it was a fantastic success, and from that day forward the media never left me alone. I was likely to be on either radio or television at least five out of the seven days. The newsmen who came with the television cameras said there was no question but that I was on television far more than the mayor of the city of Detroit, the governor of the state of Michigan and all the judges put together.”



Teaching in Germany

“I taught in the American school for two years. It had been the Garetrauden die schuler. There was a German man who was my lab assistant while I was teaching there who told me much of the way that Berliners lived and much of the background of Germany that gave me an understanding of why I as an American was so different from the rest of Germany.

There was a sense of individualism and individual freedom attempting to be expressed there in Berlin that was not anywhere. But the years that I spend there teaching certainly made me aware of the role of the United States in with the rest of the world in what was happening, how people were treated, who would starve to death and who wouldn’t because of what changes in national policy, what countries would have advantages or disadvantages, and some of the reasons why there might be a war or how a war could start because of tension on things that up until then I had been unwilling to even think about.

I found myself reading editorials and searching out editorials to find the thinking of a particular group of people or a particular person, something I had never done before I went to Germany.”

THE DETROIT teacher NEWSMAKERS

Sister to Sister *Tea at Taft*

By Judy Summers

The Eighth Grade Team at Taft Middle School hosted a Sister to Sister Tea for eighth-grade girls. It was FANTASTIC! The girls received lessons on etiquette, event planning, and public speaking prior to the tea.

The tea was first class! The tables were set with silver, china and crystal contributed by the Taft staff. The staff made delicious finger foods. Brown Bag catering service donated the beautiful linen table cloths. And the students made the lovely centerpieces. Floral designer Kelley Jones taught the girls how to make floral arrangements for the tea.

The panel of speakers included Carolyn Clifford, WXYZ-TV 7 news



A LADIES TEA – Billie Jean Edwards, DWIS member, teacher Judy Summers, WXYZ News Anchor Carolyn Clifford, Principal Naomi Lewis, Judge Micheline Rawlins, Kelley Jones of Goodness Gracious Florals, and Dolores Shephard, DWIS member.

anchor, Judy Walker of Walker Associates, Kelley Jones of Goodness Gracious Florals, Inc., and Judge Micheline Rawlins of Windsor. Each speaker was dynamic. These women spoke about their lives and



gave the girls great advice on becoming a successful woman.

The tea would not have been possible without a generous grant from the Distinguished Women in International Service, and donations from several members of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, as well as the generosity and support of the Taft staff. It goes without saying that the hard work of the custodial and engineering staff added to our success.

A very heart-warming “Thank You” goes out to everyone who made this tea such a wonderful event for our girls, especially principal Naomi Lewis, and the incredible eighth-grade team of Gracie Brown, Judy Summers, Lori Taylor, Cheryl Vincent and Dwana Wilkerson.



Johniqua Bell, Judy Walker of Walker Associates, Kelley Jones of Goodness Gracious Florals, Judge Micheline Rawlins, and Chantel Woodson.

Spain Academy the Gift of War

By Charlene Uresy,
Spain School teacher

Students and teachers at the Dr. Betty Shabazz Academy at Spain School handed out 102 blankets this winter to nine area homeless shelters for women and children. The annual service project is called “Warm The Hearts of Others” and is sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta.

Dr. Betty Shabazz, the widow of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is a Sorority. The academy is a part of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, which encourages them to maximize their talents and educational choices.

This year the academy, with the help of the girls' parents, along with Teachers Raymond Kurzban and Tait's husband, were critical to the success of the project.

Many of the girls in the academy are in need of much needed in a time of crisis.

Tait recounted how she was there to deliver the service project and needed.

The service project was a gratification of giving back to the community and also all of those who

Professional

By Charlene Uresy, Spain School teacher

Spain School, a performing arts school, has prepared her students for years. The school dance team has prepared her students for graduation into high school. One student, Michelle, will conduct clinics for her students. Herbert, a professional dancer.

Michelle's credentials in dance are impressive. She graduated from Point Park College and has been a professional dancer for six years. Michelle has performed in the National Association of Creole of Toronto, and the National Association of Creole of Toronto. In her career she has improved in her dance.

When first introduced to her mother, she talked about what it was like to be a professional dancer, such as Canada and Jamaica. She



Gives
month



low of Malcolm X, was a soror of Delta Sigma Theta mentoring program for girls ages 11 through 14 that ze their potential through knowledge and wise personal

nder the leadership of teacher Tiffany Tait, partnered with teachers at Spain, to collect and deliver the blankets. a and Gary Haverkate, Principal Ronald Alexander, and cal in making the project a success.

he program had no idea how something so simple is very of crisis.

he was walking by a shelter one day and a man asked her if r blankets. That is how she learned that blankets were desired

t was a powerful lesson in giving because it went full circle in iving. Not only did the blankets gratify those in the shelters, but o made the gifts possible.

al Dancer Visits Spain School

teacher
ng arts school, has offered dance classes to its students for many
cher Heidi Herbert, who has taught dance at Spain for 14 years,
r the All City Dance Concert, and is continuing their dance edu-
of the ways she does this is by inviting professional dancers to
nts. Herbert was very proud to have her daughter, Michelle
; spend a week with her, teaching her students.

nce are impressive. She's been dancing since the age of 11,
ege in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and has been a professional
s been a member or the Garth Fagen Dance Company, Ballet
nal Dance Theater Company of Jamaica. With each step in
er craft, and learned more about herself and the world.

other's students, she talked about her life as a professional
as like to live in New York City and in foreign countries
also told the students she was soon moving to London,

England to continue her
dancing there. The stu-
dents were impressed with
Michelle's technical abili-
ty, and were eager to learn
techniques and choreogra-
phy for their all city dance.
The week with Michelle
Herbert opened the eyes to
the Spain School students
of all the possibilities
dance has to offer them in
their future.



Building Math, Creativity and Social Skills Too

By Cathy Wilkins

Marquette elementary and middle school students rolled up their sleeves during December and participated in an architectural experience building their very own gingerbread houses in time for Christmas.



The students stayed after-school to make their houses with icing, cookies and graham crackers. Students used candy canes and gumdrops to construct street lights, and sugar wafers for chimneys. Students used the creativity and math skills to measure the graham crackers that covered the house mold as their foundation.

This project allows students to engage in hands-on communication and, most important, build social skills with their peers. Cathy Wilkins, computer science and DAPCEP teacher, assistant teacher Vivian Wade, and parent volunteer Lori Thompson assisted students with their projects.

Parents were invited to participate in the delicious afternoon. A special thank you is sent to principal Dawana Brown, assistant principal Demond Thomas, and the Marquette staff for their support. 'Tis the season to be jolly. The Marquette school family brings good cheer for the upcoming school year.

Barbara Jordan Girls Learn Crochet and Sisterhood

By Barbara Yancy-Braceful

Ever wonder what to do with a group of obnoxious, unruly, disrespectful students who don't get along with their peers, barely like themselves, and make life unbearable in your classroom?

How about giving them some crochet hooks and a ball of yarn? No, not to wound or tie one another up but as a vehicle to change their mindset.

This is exactly what Barbara Jordan teachers Sherry Andrews, right, and Lori Mitz, below, decided to do, as a last ditch effort to remedy problems with fifth- and sixth-grade students. Now instead of bickering and head snapping, they meet on Fridays after school to discuss problems – and sometimes resolve them – while learning a skill.

The other advantage: the items they are making are brilliant scarves and blankets. These will be given to charity and some will be sold to replenish their supplies.

Many staff and community members have donated materials to help in this venture. Since meeting, there has been less tension among the students and conflicts are readily resolved. Other teachers have even joined in to learn how to crochet and be a part of this wonderful group.

"It helps us relax and get along with each other," said student Kristen Robinson, 11. "I thought it would be hard but it came out to be wonderful."

So as these girls, who call themselves Butterflies, continue to journey through this metamorphosis, we wish them much success and gratitude. The experience will last a lifetime!

If you'd like to donate yarn or crochet hooks, or just commend this group, you can contact either teacher at 494-7307.

