



VERNETTA G. CAFFEY

2022

An award-winning, 45-year educational veteran, Vernetta G. Caffey has influenced hundreds of students' lives in the Alton Community School District for 36 years teaching. As part of her collegiate career, she was an Instructor of English and Writing and Academic Advisor to the Upward Bound Program at Lewis and Clark College; an Academic Counselor at Michigan State University; and an Academic Advisor at Lincoln University.

Vernetta is a high-spirited, highly respected motivational speaker. She has served as keynote and Mistress of Ceremonies for multiple events and programs. Vernetta has facilitated educational and faith-based workshops, seminars and retreats in several Midwestern and Southern states. She is also a Professional Consultant for original speeches, poems and plays for African American Studies.

While constantly challenging her intellectual capabilities with a rigorous workload and raising three sons, she always made time to actively extend herself beyond the confines of the classroom and her home. She is known for her community involvement, passion for assisting children, and commonsense approach to education. Her commitment to serve was exemplified through her participation in various fraternal and civic organizations. Locally, she has been involved in the Elijah P. Lovejoy Memorial, Wellspring Resources, City of Alton, Coalition of Concerned Citizens and Bright Hope Chapter #85 Order of Easter Star. Nationally, her activities included the Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.; National Council of Negro Women; Church Women United; and YWCA Women's Empowerment Center Advisory Board.

Vernetta is the recipient of many awards for meritorious service, civic engagement and professional achievement that has garnered regional and national recognition. In honor of the collective contributions of Vernetta and her spouse of 52 years, Thomas Caffey, the Right Track Educational Foundation, Inc. was established. This foundation expands the educational opportunity for students who display both academic and athletic prowess at Alton Senior High School by awarding a scholarship who best reflects the values gleaned from scholastic achievement and athletic competition. At home, her three children graduated high school in Alton and have become successful men. They are an Attorney in private practice, a college professor at the University of Illinois, and the Director of Planning and Development for the City of Alton.

In her own words: *"Even though I have retired for the day-to-day routine of going into the classroom, I have not stopped teaching. My passion will not allow me to stop. As long as I live, I want to remain both visible and vocal in our fight for children. I want to use all the resources I can to assist our children, celebrate their accomplishments and empower them to focus on increasing achievement levels and educational success."*



ROBIN CARLTON

2022

Robin Carlton started her philanthropic journey in 1990. She dedicated 10 years to working as a troop leader and co-leader for the girl scouts in East Alton. During this time, she organized day camps for troops and managed fundraisers. Her commitment to giving back to the community only strengthened as she raised her 6 children. She and her family have made a strong commitment to helping others in financial need. In 2015, Robin's passion to empowering women and girls so they have a voice within their communities was reaffirmed by her work with the East Alton Women's Club. She increased the membership of the club from four members to 20 members with ages ranging from 27 to 101 years. The East Alton Women's Club meets once monthly to discuss ways to give back, improve, and support their community. As a member, Robin has helped to raise money for school supplies, back to school events, and other local community events.

Since 2019, Robin's passion has led her to focusing a lot of her time, talents, and resources to spearheading a back-to-school program in East Alton. The program accepts donations of new and gently used clothing, shoes, pajamas, coats, underwear, personal hygiene products, and other essentials for children 4-18 years of age. This annual August event, where parents and kids are able to shop for items themselves, is completely free. In 2021, the back-to-school event served 170 kids. They distributed 170 coats, shoes, backpacks filled with supplies and other items. This helped to alleviate the financial burden of local families getting ready for the school year. Though the giveaway is a one-day event, Robin's works all year long collecting items, building displays, and organizing volunteers.

In addition to the supplies distributed at the event, children are also offered haircuts. It was at the 2021 event that Robin helped to expand the haircut station so that it would be more inclusive of all children. She recognized that not all children and families could experience the station because they desired hair care beyond just a cut. Thus, she added the options of hair coloring and styling. It is her goal that no one ever feel excluded.

Last Christmas, in conjunction with the East Alton Mayor's office, Ms. Carlton built a Santa's Cottage that was used around the community for free events. This was especially important as COVID precautions and quarantine were still in place.

Robin never asks for recognition, nor seeks it. If she does anything to help someone, her only form of repayment would be that they pay it forward.



CATHY COFFMAN 2022

Ms. Cathy Coffman demonstrates the mission of the YWCA in interactions in her career, with her church, and her socially relevant volunteer activities. She mentors women, cares for families in difficult situations, and treats everyone in an equitable way. Cathy's daughter stated, "My mother is a worker. She is the person in any organization who does the planning, the set-up, the event work, and then the cleanup. She does it all with very little, if any, credit." Ms. Coffman built a career as a banker at a time when men got the management positions and women were the tellers. She worked even harder becoming the Regional Operations Supervisor. She used her talents to train many other women so they could have their own banking careers.

Ms. Coffman is an original member of the non-denominational church *The Bridge* in Alton. In service to women, Cathy organized the Women's Community Group who provided items to the homeless, created school supply bags, supported children with parents in prison, and held Christmas parties for foster children. Cathy is a mentor to many women and she is pursued by them as someone they simply want to spend time with. These examples do not include the number of times her pastor has witnessed Cathy willingly sit with a person asking for help and assistance. Her pastor added, *Cathy has always been accepting of all people as a manager and with needy persons. She will help and hug people regardless of their age, socioeconomic status or skin color.* Cathy teaches Sunday school for the youngest children and runs a Junior High Youth Group of 40 teens.

A significant area of community involvement for Cathy is being the church representative on the Leadership Board for the Restore Network based in Fosterburg. This organization recruits and trains foster families so they can help children heal from trauma. Last summer, when DCFS failed to provide proper transportation, Cathy stepped up once again to help transport children between the foster family and the birth parent. Cathy greets newly placed infants and children at the foster home and shops for whatever the families need. The school aged children proudly wear the new clothes that are theirs to keep. Over the last nine years, Cathy became such an instrumental member of the church that they now pay her as a part-time employee because she was contributing so much.

Cathy is married to Rich Coffman, is a mother of 7 and grandmother of 15. She considers her family as one of her major accomplishments and is proud of all of them.



TERRIEN FENNOY 2022

Terrien Fennoy has enthusiastically served elementary school students for 31 years. Her career has consistently focused on the educational success of all students, with an emphasis on students from low-income communities. She has taught elementary school students then went onto become a Reading Interventionist, Instructional Coach, and Principal. She currently serves as principal of Madison Jr. High School in the Madison Community Unit School District #12.

Her passion for improving reading comprehension led to the creation of the Principal's Book Club for students. Monthly meetings include book discussions that culminate with meaningful activities tied to the book theme. The reading selections provide opportunities for deep discussion of relevant social issues and develop personal skills. Mrs. Fennoy has implemented a Student Advisory Board, where a select student group meets monthly to discuss issues and concerns. Topics have included school lunch, uniform mandate, and needed student activities and programs. Students get to express ideas important to them and lead to use their voices respectfully. The Spartan Student Advisory Board meetings provide the students the chance to think critically about school issues and develop a consensus presented to the Principal and Board of Education. Mrs. Fennoy believes that the student board teaches them the power of their voice and advocacy, even if they are not able to achieve the desired outcomes.

In many other ways, Mrs. Fennoy has gone beyond her job expectations. She supervised an inspirational and inclusive dance team which provided a creative and expressive outlet for students. Through community networking, she found male mentors for Black male students. The men served as positive role models and joined them during the day and in after-school activities. By addressing the growing population of Hispanic youth in the school, she introduced bilingual services to soften the transition to an unfamiliar culture. Additionally, she encouraged the participation of Hispanic students in reading and support groups.

Mrs. Fennoy has been a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. for more than 25 years. This is an organization of Black college-educated women committed to the constructive development of communities through Sisterhood, Scholarship, and Service. For more than a decade, she led the Dr. Betty Shabazz Delta Academy. This is a mentoring program for girls ten to thirteen years, focused on academic achievement, social/ emotional development, service learning, and leadership. They received tutoring, lessons on non-traditional careers, and STEM education. The girls provide community service to area residents. In 2021, Mrs. Fennoy became the Chairperson of the Education and Scholarship committee, raising over \$40,000 for high school girls aspiring to attend college. Mrs. Fennoy understands the importance of providing assistance to ensure these young women are successful in college. Hence, the young women are guided and supported through the first two years.

Mrs. Fennoy has been a lifelong educator, advocate, and champion for racial justice for young people. For more than 30 years, she has served in the education system and community serving low-income students accomplishing exceptional outcomes. She believes in fairness and equity and strives to significantly touch the lives of all students.



DEBRA FRAKES

2022

Ms. Debra Frakes is one of the busiest women in town. She is an exemplary example of all that Women of Distinction Award encompasses. Her contributions to *seniors* and to the *community* extend far beyond her job as the Marketing Director for Senior Services Plus (SSP).

For seniors, Ms. Frakes seeks to connect them with services they may require. She is Vice President of the Madison County TRIAD, a model organization in Illinois that creates collaboration between law enforcement and health care agencies to enhance seniors' quality of life. TRIAD has led the way in protecting seniors from scams that devastate their finances. During the last two years, Ms. Frakes has led teams that distributed masks, collected food and provided wellness checks. Ms. Frakes is also a member of the Older Adults Health Council that among other things hosts annual health fairs. In addition, she has helped seniors by organizing the *Feed the Need Concert* to benefit Meals on Wheels. During the COVID pandemic, she adapted and expanded programs for easier accessibility through the internet for lonely seniors. For the business community, Ms. Frakes participates actively in Alton Main Street, Riverbend Growth Association, Upper Alton Association and Riverbend Rotary Club.

Ms. Frakes has also attended to her personal growth and development by participating in Women Empowering Women, a local group that brings women together to learn, encourage, advocate, and give back. She mentored other women, shared professional leads, and increased her acumen of relevant business topics. Little Black Book (LLB) has a local chapter of diverse women in Madison County. LBB seeks to form and nurture mutually beneficial relationships and actively promote each other to clients and friends.

By participating in so many impactful organizations to improve the Alton area, Debra provided a voice for senior so their needs were considered and addressed. A woman mentored by Ms. Frakes stated, *There are several boards and committees Debra serves that look great on paper. But what cannot be seen is the love and compassion, she pours into these efforts. From women to seniors, she is making the Riverbend area a better place to love, work and visit.*



NANCY JOHNSON 2022

Ms. Johnson has been actively involved in community service for over 50 years from her college days, through her career, and now into retirement. Before she arrived in Alton, she lived in Springfield, IL where she was the first woman to be named Director of Graphics for Horace Mann Insurance Company. Her volunteer work included the Springfield Area Arts Council and Metropolitan Women's Club. She was a leader for United Cerebral Palsy of Illinois in both Springfield and Alton. After passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, she led a collation to establish a Disability

Independence Day in IL with rallies and an education and awareness campaign. For her outstanding volunteer efforts, she was named UCPI Volunteer of the Year in 1991.

Ms. Johnson taught graphics and printing at Alton Mental Health Center for ten years. In 1997, she joined the Lewis & Clark Community College in the Adult Education Division. Her role expanded to include leadership and coordination of Project READ, a state-funded program. After hours, she was president of the Metro East Literacy Council and the Metropolitan St. Louis Literacy Roundtable. These literacy-related responsibilities involved diverse populations and opportunities to mentor women to become more literate and realize educational goals.

Since her retirement in 2009, support for her community has only increased. Today, she is an active member of Alton Community Service League and treasurer of the Upper Alton Women's Club. She volunteered at the Caravan Resale Shop serving the Oasis Women's Center. Now she has taken that resale experience and volunteers at Wesley House Hearts-in-Mission (a resale shop at Asbury Village) whereby proceeds go to agencies that support women and families.

For many years, Ms. Johnson has been very involved with her church. She is a trustee, a member of the Community Outreach Team, and president of Women's Ministries. She was President of the local P.E.O. Chapter leading their scholarship programs. With Main Street United Methodist Church, she volunteered every summer with SAK (Serving Area Kids) a program for disadvantaged children. She bagged lunches, distributed drinks, and most importantly, interacted with the children. For over ten years, these children saw her nearly every week.

This nominee has been giving back to her community with her time, treasures, and talents both as a professional woman and a volunteer throughout her lifetime advancing adult literacy, helping disadvantaged children, and empowering women through faith and education. As a role model for women and girls throughout her professional career, she demonstrated a direct commitment to the YWCA mission of empowering women, positively effecting youth and families and eliminating racism.



LATASHA LEFLORE- PORTER 2022

Latasha LeFlore-Porter is a devoted and inspiring longtime resident of Godfrey and Alton. She is a loving wife and mother to three amazing young men; Adrian, a Captain in the Army in El Paso, TX; Christian, with Bank of America Securities in Manhattan, NY; and Donovan, at Chapman University in Orange, CA.

Latasha graduated from Alton High School Class of 1989 and went on to the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign to graduate with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 1995. In 2005, she received a master's degree in Educational Leadership. Latasha has over 25 years' experience as an Educator and Administrator. She has 16 years' experience in the Alton School District. She was Assistant Principal for the elementary and the middle schools before her current position as Principal of Lewis and Clark Elementary School. Latasha fosters a safe and fun learning ambiance for her students in a stable environment. She develops lasting relationships with her staff and goes above and beyond to make sure they have what they need to be the best teachers they can. In 2008, she received the Alton School District *Heart of the School Award* for going the extra mile. In 2014, she was a recipient of the Alton School District Distinguished Alumni Award.

Mrs. Porter is very active in the Alton community. She is a Board member on the Alton Black Alumni Association, serving on the Scholarship, Newsletter, and Reunion Committees. She is an Alton Area Optimist Club member, an Alton Administrative Associate member, and a member of the Alton Boys and Girls Club Uncomfortable Conversation Committee. She was honored by the Alton NAACP for *Fulfilling the Dream through Education* in 2013.

Latasha worships at the Mt. Nebo Missionary Baptist Church in Madison where she has been a Sunday school teacher. She has a beautiful, warm and fuzzy spirit and no matter the situation, she always keeps a smile on her face with the most uplifting spirit! In 2021, she stepped out of her comfort zone and did an amazing job portraying Eliza Walker Williams during Alton Vintage Voices, who was Alton's first Democratic Precinct Committeewoman and Josephine Marley Beckwith's Girls Reserve Advisor. In her own words, her mission in life is *Being dedicated to openly displaying kindness, giving empathy and compassion to all parties, while creating a climate of mutual respect.*



NANCY ORRILL 2022

Nancy Orrill is an outstanding member of the Godfrey, Illinois community. After working for 31 years, she pursued her passion of gardening and became a certified Master Gardener upon completion of a ten-week course through the University of Illinois Extension Service. Master Gardeners are volunteers trained to provide a network of gardening programs and horticultural activities to educate the public and enhance life in their communities. A small community garden had been started in Godfrey when Ms. Orrill became involved. With her leadership, the Garden was taken to new heights. Ms. Orrill has commandeered a team of nine women and five men along with numerous youth volunteers to maintain and grow the Garden. These volunteers were from Godfrey, Brighton, Jerseyville, and Edwardsville area. With her stewardship, she acquired monies that enhanced the Garden with a compost area, bins for top soil and wood chips, a trellis, a Bug Hotel, a fire pit, and a memorial area for a local Godfrey leader. According to Extension Services, Ms. Orrill developed a “garden gem” in Madison County.

But Ms. Orrill’s efforts are not concentrated on just growing a pretty garden. Her team’s work resulted in the donation of nearly two-thousand pounds of fresh produce to the Crisis Food Pantry in 2021. The donations to the Food Pantry go a long way to provide options for local residents living in poverty. Since 2014, preschoolers at the Little Knights Day Care Center were given a small area to garden. The children plant vegetables and flowers and contribute to what is donated to the food pantry. The Garden team have provided group talks to local area women’s groups and Garden Clubs. Ms. Orrill appears twice per year on the local radio station WGBZ. Gardening tips abound in all of her talks and on the Facebook page she maintains. She was always well received and frequently invited to return.

Ms. Orrill was an outstanding mentor for women. She encouraged local women to participate in the Garden and mentored them as they completed the 60 hours of volunteer work required for certification as a Master Gardener. She led a dedicated group of 6-9 women who continually advanced the Gardens contribution to the community. One volunteer stated, “I met Nancy in 2015 when I started volunteering as a Master Gardener. Nancy was very welcoming to me and, as the youngest volunteer, she has continued to encourage me to take on more responsibilities.” Mayor McCormick said, *“I would love to see Nancy recognized for the service and sunny disposition she provides to the Godfrey community. Nancy is tireless in volunteering herself for the benefit of the garden and our part in the community. She is the glue that holds our garden community together.”*



FAYE WALKER TAYLOR 2022

Faye Taylor has been a pillar in the Alton community for several years and is involved in many organizations in addition to being a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. She has built her career over 32 years, working at OSF St. Anthony's Health Center.

Ms. Taylor has been a bright light and positive influence for women in the Alton community. She was an Alton Precinct Committee member for several years and still attends council meetings. Serving on the Board of Alton NAACP chapter led to her participation in many efforts to champion for equality for all. As a Back to Mexico Initiative member, she organized a day of fun activities for families, live music and a presentation about the Mexico neighborhood history. She was a leading catalyst in charge of gathering school supplies and supporting other initiatives for this struggling neighborhood in Alton. She has lent her skills to the Hampton Garden providing vegetables for area residents. She served on the Clayton and Virginia Williams Foundation to forge education alliances and advocate for the underserved within Alton. During the YWCA *Get Out to Vote* initiative, she was able to increase voter awareness and participation. She has worked diligently to encourage others to use their voices by delivering voter education about voting rights. Voter forums provided information on different ways to vote in order to increase voter turnout. From ringing bells for Salvation Army at Christmas, doing city clean up and all of the activities above, Faye truly impacts thousands of people in Alton.

Ms. Taylor actively demonstrates her faith every day. She is a member of the Deliverance Temple Church of God in Christ Complex. She had served as District Aspiring Missionary Leader, District Choir President, Sunshine Band Choir Leader and Purity Leader. This direct contact with young women has resulted in giving them a positive role model. During the pandemic, Faye created an over-the-phone comforting program that allowed church members to call her at any hour. These calls helped people obtain advice on life situations and healthy ways of living. Faye visits the sick and serves as a listening ear.

In her spare time, she is a creative songwriter and poet. Her voice has been a comfort and encouragement to those she serves. Ms. Taylor's daughter stated, "Her strong presence has allowed her to mentor and empower women to strive for their dreams and see the beauty within themselves."



STACI WESTFALL- HERRON 2022

Staci Herron is a dedicated longtime resident of Alton and Godfrey and loving mother to her adult son Chandler. Ms. Herron is an Educator, a true advocate for her community and a spiritual supporter in her church community. She was a proud 1985 graduate of Alton High School. Ms. Herron has been an Educator in the Jennings School District for over 21 years, but her educational

career in Missouri has never diminished the dedication and love she has for the Alton community. This is exemplified in numerous ways. Ms. Herron is a Youth Sponsor for and a long-time member of the Alton Section of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. in Alton. As a Sponsor for the Youth Section of NCNW, Staci's goal is to provide adolescent females with accurate information about life issues, prepare them for leadership roles, and to help them develop a strong sense of self, resiliency, and social skills, thus empowering them to make positive choices for their futures and reduce the risk of life-threatening behavior. She strives to build character in young women through mentorship and leadership programs.

She lives by the organization's motto: *Enter to Learn and Depart to Serve* (Mary McLeod Bethune). As a dedicated Board member of the Friends of the 60's/Alton Black Alumni Association, she has served on yet another non-profit organization vital to the Black community. Ms. Herron participated in transitioning that organization from a social organization to one that is committed to social action and educational successes. Additionally, she was an original member of the Leo C. Cox Memorial Scholarship selection committee. This scholarship gives Alton youth opportunities that will allow them to flourish into adults who display responsibility, empathy and respect for others and themselves.

Ms. Herron also contributes to her church. At The Spirit Church of St. Ann, MO, she serves on the Greeter's Ministry where she always shares her warm spirit and beautiful smile.

Throughout her years of experience in teaching and mentoring students, Ms. Herron has dedicated her work to empower youth, especially our young girls. She has been an avid mentor and role model to many young women along her path as evidenced by the mentoring relationships she maintains with many of her former students, parents and colleagues.