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## 'Family business': 3 Joyners retire after 92 combined years at WPS

By MOLLY WILLIAMS The Winchester Star

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From left, Bobbie Joyner, husband Doug Joyner and sister-in-law Martha Gay Joyner are retiring after long careers with Winchester Public Schools totaling 92 combined years.

Provided photo

A combined 92 years of service to Winchester Public Schools and 126 years in education are drawing to a close as three members of the Joyner family prepare to retire at the end of the school year.

Doug Joyner, his wife Bobbie Joyner and his sister Martha Gay Joyner have dedicated decades of their lives to WPS, Bobbie as a long-time classroom teacher, Martha as a school nurse and Doug in roles ranging from teacher to division-level administrator.

As they prepare to step into a new phase of life, the Joyners expressed bittersweet sentiments about leaving WPS after so many years.

"They call it ... liminal space," Doug Joyner said in a recent interview. "... When you're not ... in the past, but you're not to where you are in the future, like commencement for the kids next Friday. You're ... in that in-between space."

### The end of an era

The Joyners' legacy in WPS extends beyond the current generation of retirees.

Doug and Martha Gay Joyners' parents, Mary Ruth and Vernon, were both WPS employees for 25 years.

Mary Ruth Joyner was a teacher and later a principal at Garland R. Quarles Elementary School before ending her career as the division's director of instruction, and Vernon Joyner was a music teacher and coordinator of music.

His father, Doug Joyner said, was the last employee former longtime superintendent Garland Quarles ever hired.

According to current WPS Superintendent Jason Van Heukelum, the three Joyners' retirements will usher in the first era since 1965 that WPS has not employed a Joyner.

"This legacy of service is unprecedented," he wrote in a statement.

That legacy, Doug Joyner said, isn't something that he mulls over, but it's always there.

"You know, the sun comes up and it's there, but then you realize and you appreciate it because of that," he said.

Moving through his career with Bobbie and Martha Gay as colleagues has been comforting, Joyner added. His children "have never known a school without a Joyner."

"[Y]ou feel invested in a different way in a place and places that you go through because ... it's the whole family," he said. "... It was special to have that connection, and have the family involved in the family business."

## Doug Joyner: 32 years with WPS, 44 in education

Growing up in a family of educators, Doug Joyner always wanted to be a teacher.

"You don't get into this business to make a living," he said, "you get into it to make a difference. ... It's been the best thing ever."

Joyner, who is the division's director of human resources, began his career as an instrumental music and choral teacher in Clarke County, where he met Bobbie on his first day of work and knew instantly that he wanted to marry her.

He worked in Warren County and Culpeper in addition to his decades with WPS.

While he's taken on many roles throughout his career, Joyner was particularly fond of being Handley's principal.

His alma mater, he said, is a special place with a long history.

"I would always tell the classes as they leave, you know, leaving can be terribly exciting and wonderfully frightening all at the same time, but always remember that this is home, that ... they are tied here with really strong bonds," he said.

Joyner is proud of many things throughout his career, but it's the people and their successes that bring him the most joy.

"You truly accomplish something lasting when you see the impact that you've had in some small way for somebody," Joyner said. "There's nothing that supersedes that."

He reflected on times where former students and staff members have returned to him with small tidbits that made a big difference in their lives.

"It might have been something that you did that you didn't give a second thought to," Joyner said. "... That's probably the most personally meaningful, because there's a real personal connection that caused that, and I've had that happen a number of times. I'm old."

Technologies and teaching methods have changed over the years, but Joyner said that the drive of educators to make a difference in the lives of students has remained.

"That's what it's about," he said. "People who are interested in making that difference and can be role models for kids."

As he prepares to step away from his time at WPS, Joyner said he feels he's leaving a strong division with an exciting future.

"I see where we're headed and what we're targeting, and I think with our students ... at the core of what we're doing, you can't help but be successful if that's where you keep your focus," he said.

## Martha Gay Joyner: 26 years with WPS, 36 in education

When she finished nursing school, Martha Gay Joyner worked at National Rehab Hospital in Washington, D.C.

She loved the job, she said, but city life wasn't for her.

She moved back home to Winchester and did a stint as a charge nurse in a hospital, but still, something wasn't quite right.

"I was always apologizing to patients," she said, "and I decided this is not what I thought nursing was, not what I want to do."

And so Joyner began looking for positions. She saw that nearby Frederick County Public Schools was hiring for a school nurse, and she decided to give it a shot.

Finally, Joyner had found her calling.

"I'm so blessed to be able to have a job for 36 years that I absolutely love doing, and that is taking care of patients," she said. "I want to take care of children, but also staff."

After a decade with Frederick County Public Schools, Joyner, a Handley graduate, began working as a school nurse in WPS.

Originally, she served both Virginia Avenue Charlotte DeHart and Frederick Douglass elementary schools. Then when the School Board decided to place a designated nurse in every school, she settled in at Frederick Douglass, where she'd stay for the rest of her career.

The profession has changed over the years, Joyner said, particularly in terms of the amount of acute care she provides to students with differing needs.

That includes specialized equipment like gastronomy tubes or tracheostomies and monitoring conditions like seizures or diabetes.

"Acute medical students probably weren't even in school when I started 36 [years ago,]" Joyner said. "... And now, students like that are in public education, and we have to accommodate their needs."

Finding ways to meet student needs while prioritizing their education has driven Joyner throughout her career. Seeing that work pay off for students, she said, has been her reward.

She noted one student, in particular, with whom she worked from the time of diagnosis as a small child to the end of her elementary school years.

"She's grown so much," Joyner said, "and we've gone from her being dependent on me to her telling me what she's going to do next. ... It's incredible. That's the payment right there. That's the reason I'm there."

Joyner is also proud of her efforts to encourage and educate students on healthy eating habits.

In retirement, Joyner is looking forward to spending time with her great-niece and great-nephew, as well as her father, and she intends on being there should WPS ever need her help.

She plans on assisting with hearing and vision screenings, she said, as soon as possible.

## **Bobbie Joyner: 34 years with WPS, 46 in education**

Bobbie Joyner still remembers her fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Kerns, a woman who brought world history to life with tales of her global travels.

"Every place we learned about, she had slides, and we would watch those, and I just thought she was wonderful," Joyner said. "I remember her having a giant pocketbook, and her letting you carry the pocketbook, and thinking you were very important when you got to carry that for her."

Looking back, Joyner says it was probably Mrs. Kerns who inspired her to become a teacher.

When seeking teaching jobs, the Pennsylvania native "drew a four-hour circle from home and applied to different places."

She landed in Clarke County, where she kicked off her career teaching sixth grade.

Joyner also taught in Warren County, Frederick County and Culpeper.

In 1999, she returned to Winchester, where she'd spend the last 26 years of her career teaching at John Kerr Elementary School.

For the past 11 years, Joyner has worked with John Kerr's Virginia Preschool Initiative students.

"All I ever wanted to do was to be a teacher," she said. "So I think when I was placed in with the preschool program, it kind of reinvigorated why I like teaching, because we're getting kids from low-income families, so they're at risk, and it's been very rewarding working with them."

Over the years, Joyner said she's enjoyed working with children, helping them develop self-esteem and coping skills and watching them mature and develop.

WPS, she said, is "a really wonderful school system" with professional opportunities and positive working relationships.

Leaving it behind is "a little bittersweet, because I've enjoyed what I've done, or I wouldn't have been here this long."

"But it's time," she continued. "We have grandchildren now, and I'd like to spend time with them," as well as other family members.

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