



## County of Prince Edward, Virginia News Release – June 3, 2009

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### **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS UNVEILS LIGHT OF RECONCILIATION MEMORIAL *Courthouse Marker Honors Prince Edward County Heroes***

At a sunset ceremony today, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors unveiled the Light of Reconciliation Memorial on the front lawn of the Prince Edward County Courthouse. The permanent memorial marker honors Barbara Rose Johns and the students of Robert Russa Moton High School and all the children of Prince Edward County for their historic role in ending public school segregation in the United States.

Following the unveiling, Board of Supervisors Chairman, William G. Fore, Jr., invited all individuals who were school age between 1951 and 1964 to lead a “walk of honor” on the newly re-landscaped courthouse lawn. The walk of honor was lead by Mrs. Louise Foster, a Prince Edward County resident and the last living parent and original litigant in *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*. The former students were the first to view the Light of Reconciliation Memorial.

In 1959, Prince Edward County closed its public schools in defiance of the desegregation ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The schools remained closed until 1964, when a second Supreme Court decision, *Griffin vs. County School Board* forced the county to reopen its public schools.

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The Memorial is inscribed with the words from a resolution adopted by the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors on July 8, 2008. The marker reads:

*“Illuminated in the courthouse bell tower on July 21, 2008  
by the Board of Supervisors of Prince Edward County,  
in honor of Barbara Rose Johns and the students of Robert Russa Moton High School  
and all the children of our county,  
for their historic role in ending public school segregation in the United States  
and with sorrow for closing schools.  
When we raise our eyes to see this light,  
may we also incline our hearts and minds  
to shine our own light of reconciliation toward all people.”*

*Now, Therefore be it resolved, that we,  
the undersigned members of the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors,  
believe that the closing of public schools in our county from 1959 to 1964 was wrong;  
and we grieve for the way lives were forever changed,  
for the pain that was caused, and for how those locked doors shuttered opportunities  
and barricaded the dreams our children had for their own lifetimes;  
and for all wounds known and unknown;  
we regret those past actions;*

Senator Mark Warner and Congressman Tom Perriello also paid tribute to the Light of Reconciliation Memorial by sending representatives to the event. Warner's Regional Representative, Lou Arnatt Kadiri read a letter from Senator Warner. Perriello's District Director, Ridge Schuyler, read remarks delivered by Congressman Perriello today on the floor of the United States House of Representatives. The program also included comments by Russell L. Dove, Chairman of the Prince Edward County School Board, who began his education in Prince Edward County in 1964, the year the schools reopened.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Chairman Fore read from the book *“The Children of Children Keep Coming,”* by African-American author Russell L. Goins. Chairman Fore read Goins' words, *“America, heal. We sit on the same green grass, Sowing the colors of red, white and blue. America, from this moment on, We drink from the same bottomless well of Democracy. We sit in a moment of history. This is our country.”*

Chairman Fore then challenged the Prince Edward community by stating “Each day, each of us must find the courage to challenge those who carry divisiveness and prejudice. Help us pass to the next generation a better community, a better school system, and a better Prince Edward County than the one we inherited. Let us each shine our light of reconciliation toward all people. “

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MARK R. WARNER  
VIRGINIA

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4606

June 3, 2009

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Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors  
County Administration Office  
Post Office Box 382  
Farmville, Virginia 23901

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to extend warm greetings to everyone gathered today for the formal dedication of the Light of Reconciliation Memorial.

The Memorial reminds us that Prince Edward County was at the center of the struggle for school desegregation in the 1950s and 60s. Countless individuals were negatively affected by the closure of Prince Edward County public schools. Families were torn apart. Brothers and sisters were sent to different corners of the state or even further in order to attend school. Many children stayed behind and lost years of education and opportunity.

But it also reminds us of the incredible courage of a young Barbara Johns, her fellow students at Robert Russa Moton High School, and the citizens who supported them in the protest that eventually brought desegregation to this country. This adversity brought forth a stunning example of the indelible impact ordinary citizens, even children, can have on our shared history.

I congratulate Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors for apologizing for the wrongs of the past and dedicating a memorial that will encourage public discussion and help to heal the wounds of the past.

On this important occasion, I am pleased to send my best wishes to all the citizens of Prince Edward County. I look forward to visiting the Light of Reconciliation Memorial next time I am in the area.

Sincerely,

MARK R. WARNER  
United States Senator

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# CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE *111<sup>th</sup>* CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2009

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STATEMENT OF  
**HON. TOM PERRIELLO**  
OF VIRGINIA  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Madame Speaker, today I wish to commemorate the official unveiling and dedication of the Light of Reconciliation Memorial in Prince Edward County, Virginia. The Light of Reconciliation, in the bell tower of the Prince Edward County Courthouse, is a permanent monument created to honor the memory of the historic events in Prince Edward County during the era of public school segregation, to recognize the role of local students in ending school discrimination in Virginia and across the United States and to call on each of us to shine our own Light of Reconciliation in the world.

In 1951, a group of dedicated high school students led by Barbara Rose Johns organized a strike to protest the disgraceful condition of Robert Russa Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia. The school lacked a gymnasium, a cafeteria, heat, desks, blackboards, and in some cases even classrooms: a school bus parked outside served as one classroom for the overcrowded and underfunded school. The student strike ultimately led to *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, one of the five court cases that would make up *Brown v. Board of Education*. The *Davis* case was the only one of the five to arise from student activism. Following the Supreme Court's decision that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," Prince Edward County closed its public schools for the years of 1959 to 1964 rather than allow black and white students to attend school together. After five years and the Supreme Court decision in *Griffin v. County School Board*, the schools were finally reopened and integrated. The Light of Reconciliation and the memorial stand as both a reminder of the mistakes of the past and a celebration of the students from R.R. Moton High School and from other schools across the country who continued the fight for education for all.

Today marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the action that would close the Prince Edward County public schools, one of the darkest moments of Virginia's civil rights struggle. Acknowledging this part our history is painful, and I commend the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors for their courage in publicizing past transgressions against our fellow citizens in hopes of preventing future ones. It is only in seeking truth about our past that we can hope to pursue justice for our future, and this memorial is a public expression of our renewed commitment to justice for all.

On this occasion we are reminded that each of us is called to work to bring our nation closer to its fundamental ideals of equality. If one 16-year-old student can spark the protests that would ultimately galvanize a nation in the cause of civil rights, we should all ask of ourselves what we can do to fight for human dignity and the common good. As long as inequality and suffering persist in our nation and in the world, our work is incomplete. This memorial not only looks back to the dreams deferred by locked schoolhouse doors, but also forward to a better nation, one of ever-expanding opportunity for all. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." Let this light in Prince Edward County, Virginia be a permanent reminder of our ongoing struggle for a fairer world.