



County of Prince Edward, Virginia

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BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ILLUMINATES LIGHT OF RECONCILIATION

Prince Edward County Honors its Heroes

The Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors at a sunset ceremony today illuminated a Light of Reconciliation in the bell tower of the Prince Edward County Courthouse and announced that a permanent memorial marker will be placed on the front lawn of the courthouse in honor of 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.

“It was important and fitting that on the day the Commonwealth dedicated the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial on the grounds of the Virginia State Capitol, that we find a way to bring it home to Prince Edward County,” said Board of Supervisors Chairman William G. Fore, Jr. “I believe the Virginia Civil Rights Memorial is a monument to the history of Prince Edward County, to our courageous citizens, our heroes. The Light of Reconciliation is a beacon for the future of Prince Edward County.”

In 1959, the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors 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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In addition, all of the members of the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors participated in the ceremony by reading the resolution that was adopted at their July 8, 2008 meeting. The resolution states 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.”*

“I think it was necessary for the Board of Supervisors to say that closing the schools was wrong, and that we regret those past actions,” said Supervisor Mattie P. Wiley, who also chaired the Light of Reconciliation committee. Mrs. Wiley was a student in Prince Edward County when the schools closed. She finished her education in Ohio, and later moved back to Prince Edward County. “I spent much time away from home and away from my parents and brothers and sisters in order to continue my education. I now sit on the Board of Supervisors. This could not have happened back in the days of my youth. Times have changed. For this I am grateful.”

At tonight’s courthouse event the Light of Reconciliation was ceremoniously illuminated by Board Chairman William Fore, Jr. and Joan Johns Cobbs, sister of the late Barbara Rose Johns, who on April 23, 1951, led the student strike at R.R. Moton High School to protest the separate but very unequal conditions under which they must study. The program also included remarks by L. Francis “Skip” Griffin, Jr., lead plaintiff in the Supreme Court case Griffin vs. County School Board and eldest son of the late Reverend L. Francis Griffin, who led the civil rights movement in Prince Edward County in the 1950’s.

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