



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Plaque Unveiled in Winnie Brown Gym

A plaque honoring Winnie Harris Brown, the first principal of Ross S. Sterling High School and one of the first women principals of any 4-A high school in the nation, was unveiled in the entry of the Winnie Brown Gymnasium February 10, 2015, before the boys varsity basketball game.

Brown, a graduate of the University of Texas, began her teaching career in 1936 in Wheelock, Texas, and later taught in Tabor and in Bryan, her hometown. In 1940-41, she was an area supervisor in homemaking education for the Texas Education Agency. She and her husband, Orval, an engineer for the Humble Oil and Refining Company, came to Baytown in 1941, and she became a part-time instructor for Lee College. Brown starting teaching home economics at Robert E. Lee High School in 1943, later becoming dean of girls. She had the distinction of being the first guidance counselor at Lee in 1949 and served as an assistant principal until 1963.

Selected as principal in 1963 for Ross S. Sterling High School, Brown made planning for the new school a community project, asking input on the school name, mascot, song and colors. She treasured the yardstick she used to measure various rooms and structures when Sterling was under construction and placed it in a burlap holder in her office. Sterling opened in 1966, and Brown became known as "Lady in Blue," attending Sterling activities and sports events wearing the school color. Her office was decorated in blue, and she was given two blue telephones with silver covers by her faculty.

During Brown's time as principal, the student population of Sterling increased from 1150 to 2214. In 1973, Winnie Brown retired, and Winnie Brown Day was proclaimed in her honor by Baytown's mayor. She received the American Educators Medal from the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge in 1973 and was honored by the State Supreme Court Justices for helping young people better understand the fundamental principles of freedom. In 1976, she served as coordinator of the Harris County Bicentennial Youth Fair.



A plaque was unveiled recently in the entry of Ross S. Sterling High School's Winnie Brown Gymnasium in honor of Brown, the first principal of Sterling. Pictured in front of the plaque are (l to r) Willena Cherry, Brown's former secretary; Randal O'Brien, Goose Creek CISD acting superintendent; Kevin Foxworth, Sterling principal; Bernie Mulvaney, Goose Creek CISD athletic director; Suzi Powers, former Sterling English teacher; Greg Smith, Sterling head basketball coach and Pete Gareri, Sterling head football coach and campus athletic director.

Active in Delta Kappa Gamma, Baytown Service League, the Girl Scout Board, the YMCA Board, Pilot International and P.E.O., Brown returned to Bryan in 1985. She continued to be active in her church and the community until her death in 1998.

Special guests who turned out to honor the late principal at the plaque unveiling were Willena Cherry, Brown's secretary at Sterling, and Suzi Powers, former Sterling English teacher. Cherry had worked at Robert E. Lee High School when Brown was an assistant principal there.

"One day she he asked me if I'd go to the Board meeting with her that night, and I had no idea why, but I would have done just about anything she asked me to do," said Cherry. "When the Board named her principal of the new school, she asked them if I could be her secretary. I was so surprised!"

Winnie Harris Brown was Ross S. Sterling High School's first principal, and she is still "First Lady" in the hearts of former students and Ranger fans everywhere.

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