

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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February 19, 2013

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Early childhood education leader honored for service to young children

KOKOMO, Ind. — Marilyn Skinner was inspired to reach for leadership roles by the principal at Bon Air Elementary School, where she began her teaching career.

Nearly 50 year later, Skinner, director of Indiana University Kokomo’s Center for Early Childhood Education, inspires others with her dedication to preparing Howard County’s youngest residents to succeed when they go to kindergarten. She is a leader in the community as well, volunteering with organizations including Altrusa, Rotary Club, and Partners in Education. She led the 2013 United Way of Howard County campaign as chairperson, and surpassed the fund raising goal of \$1.8 million.

She has earned numerous accolades for her work, most recently as an Indiana Women of Achievement award winner for Distinction in Early Childhood Education. The award was given by the College of Sciences and Humanities at Ball State University.

“I don’t do this for recognition,” Skinner said. “I just have a passion for helping people with my God given talents. It’s a great reward, and you always feel satisfied.”

She is also happy that there is greater awareness of the importance of early childhood education in preparing children to succeed beyond preschool.

“I’ve been preaching from the hilltops how important it is,” she said. “It’s gratifying to see the state and local governments recognize it as well.”

Skinner also was interviewed as a woman in leadership for a university-sponsored study, with the purpose of seeing what traits successful female leaders have in common.

“I am glad to help, to give a hand up to young women, and show them how they can get into leadership,” Skinner said.

Skinner could never have imagined she would emerge as a strong leader when she began her teaching career.

“I was comfortable in front of little kids, but not with adults,” she said, adding that her principal kept giving her larger and larger leadership roles, helping build her comfort level working with her peers.

She moved from the classroom into administration, with the distinction of being the first woman to serve as an assistant principal, principal, and assistant superintendent in the Kokomo schools. After retiring, she worked part-time for Head Start, and then supervised student teachers for three universities before deciding it was time to “really retire.”

She planned to serve as director of the early childhood center for a few months when it first opened, funded by a \$1.5 million Lilly Endowment grant. Nearly eight years later, she is still there, and recently received a two-year grant extension, as her careful planning means the center has not yet expended the funding.

Her goal is to grow community financial support for the center, so it can continue operations when the grant funding is gone.

“I believe our community realizes that our children needs the resources we offer, to help parents do their best as their child’s first teacher,” she said. “I want the center to always be available, and always be free.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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