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Learning for a Lifetime

Couple's \$700,000 donation will fund endowed chair in honor of former English teacher

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WINCHESTER -- Thirty-three years after meeting as students, J.J. and Kaye Smith have pledged the second-largest donation in history to Winchester Public Schools in honor of one of their favorite teachers.

The Smiths' \$700,000 donation will be used to partially fund an endowed chair in honor of James Porterfield, who served as an English teacher for 30 years. Mary K. Tedrow, an English teacher at John Handley High School, was recognized Monday as the first person to fill this chair.

Hundreds of guests, including School Board and City Council members, past contributors and current JHHS teachers and students filed into the high school's main hall Monday to celebrate the gift.

"This speaks volumes of the importance of this announcement," said H. Russell Potts Jr., executive director of the Winchester Education Foundation.

WEF President Denny Bromley pointed out the characteristic most often referenced throughout the event in relation to Porterfield.

"You not only taught them -- you challenged them, and you did it with much enthusiasm," Bromley said.

"Mr. Porterfield is an intense man," J.J. Smith said. "... He could not stand still." School Board member N. Randolph "Randy" Bryant said Porterfield, "reached out and grabbed kids and make kids want to learn".

Many of the speakers drew from personal experience, often noting that Porterfield could still remember their full names and year of graduation decades after that date. Tedrow also spoke about her first impressions of Porterfield.

"Jim Porterfield, though he may not realize it, was one of those mentors for me," she said, noting that when her children became his students, "I was confident that their lives would be enriched."

Porterfield, beaming throughout the service, hobbled up to the microphone with a cast strapped to one foot. "I always knew I would do two things," he said, listing becoming a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army and teaching English as those goals. "... I have done the two things in life I wanted to do ... not many people can say that."

He spoke on his thoughts about the profession, saying he prepared for class by re-introducing himself to famous English literature greats, whom he quoted throughout his speech.

Porterfield retired from full-time teaching in July 2001, but continues to serve as a substitute teacher for the school system, according to a biography provided by the WEF. He graduated from Virginia Military Institute, and served two years in the military before pursuing a graduate degree from Virginia Tech and entering into the teaching profession.

The only larger donation in the history of the WEF came from James R. Wilkins, Jr., who was also present at the ceremony. According to a news release, the Wilkins family has donated \$1.15 million. Total, the WEF has received more than \$8.6 million.



Former Handley High School English teacher Jim Porterfield, left, applauds beside J.J. and Kaye Smith, who gave a \$700,000 gift to the Winchester Education Foundation in honor of Porterfield on Monday. The Smiths, who were students of Porterfield, donated the funds for an endowed chair in honor of Porterfield and also to fund various academic projects at Handley. Rich Cooley/Northern Virginia Daily



Former Handley High School English teacher Jim Porterfield, left, embraces J.J. Smith who gave a \$700,000 gift to the Winchester Education Foundation in honor of Porterfield on Monday. Smith and his wife, Kaye, who were students of Porterfield, donated the funds for an endowed chair honoring Porterfield and to fund various academic projects.

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