



Photos by Mike Ulery | Daily Call
 Long-time Piqua City Schools educator Yuri Willcox reacts to the plaque unveiled in her honor in the commons area of Piqua High School on Monday. With Willcox are school board members Clint Bostick, Andy Hite, Bob Luby, and Frank Patrizio.

A 'shared honor' celebrated

PCS memorializes Willcox as namesake for commons

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PIQUA — "Education of our children is the key to our greatness."

That is what reads on the new plaque hanging in the recently named "Yuri Willcox Commons" at Piqua High School, which was unveiled during a ceremony held there Monday evening honoring local educator Yuriko "Yuri" Willcox for her contributions to the community.

For those who met and worked with Willcox, she left an impression. PHS Principal Rob Messick began the ceremony, saying that he did not get the opportunity to work with Willcox, but when he told a former acquaintance that he was working at Piqua City Schools, the first thing he asked Messick was, "Do you know Yuri Willcox?"

When he went on to tell Messick how Willcox was "the most amazing person," Messick said, "That resonated."

"I'm just very blessed and obviously, Piqua's very blessed," Messick said about having Willcox's legacy at PCS.

In April, the Piqua Board of the Education



Long-time Piqua City Schools educator Yuri Willcox returned to Piqua High School on Thursday to watch as the school commons area was dedicated in her honor.

announced the Diversity Committee had chosen Willcox as the namesake for the commons.

"It is my honor to be a part of this program," said Piqua BOE President Frank Patrizio, who was also a member of the Diversity Committee. Patrizio said that it was important to promote, educate, and celebrate differences, and it was the goal of the board and the Diversity Committee to recognize a person with a diverse background by naming the commons after him or her.

Prior to the Diversity

Committee choosing Willcox, social studies teacher Justin Hemm's minorities studies class identified and researched various people who had an impact on the community as possible honorees last year. The students conducted research with historians at the Piqua Public Library, traced genealogy, utilized census data, looked through yearbooks, and studied over 6,000 vertical files for this project.

"This really fostered with the groups," Hemm said. "They had to work together."

Hemm explained that

the groups also had to reach out to people and conduct interviews.

"Very, very awesome experience," Hemm said.

The students then presented their findings and recommendations to the Piqua BOE, who turned over the decision to the Diversity Committee.

"I am deeply honored," Willcox said Monday evening. Willcox attended the ceremony with four generations of her family.

Willcox said that she was especially touched by the fact that it was a group of young students who helped choose her for this honor. She noted that she has been retired over 20 years, before many of those students were born.

"It was not only moving, but very gratifying," Willcox said.

In her youth, Willcox was a sixth grade student from Atlantic City Friends School visiting in Japan when Pearl Harbor was attacked during World War II. Willcox then spent two years learning Japanese before attending and graduating from Seijo Girls High School in 1946. Willcox then attended Tokyo Women's University until she took a U.S. Civil Service position with the

Honor

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Eighth Army War Crimes Division in Yokohama.

Willcox returned to the United States in 1948 and married Jack Willcox, to whom Willcox attributes being able to pursue a career in education.

"It was because of Jack I was able to become an educator," Willcox said.

Willcox earned a bachelor's in education magna cum laude and a master's in education, both from Miami University. Between 1965-1975, Willcox was a sixth grade teacher at Favorite Hill Elementary School under Edna Agenbrood. Willcox was then the principal at North Street School between 1975-1977. In 1978, Willcox was promoted to PCS director of elementary instruction, a position from which she retired in 1993.

Willcox was also honored for her past roles of president of the Piqua Education Association, president of West-

ern Ohio Education Association, National Education Association Board of Directors, Piqua United Way board member, and member of the Advisory Board for Miami County Juvenile Court.

"Of all things, I think the fact that we work with children is what is most uplifting, most promising for our community," Willcox said. "This community has embraced me."

Willcox emphasized that this honor was not just for her, but for the entire faculty and staff of PCS.

"Nothing is ever done in isolation," Willcox said. "I think this is a shared honor."

Willcox hoped that she had installed in a students a body of knowledge, a love learning, a sense of respect and responsibility, and a greater tolerance and appreciation for others and their differences.

"We don't all need to be alike, but we all need to be respected," Willcox said.

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