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Empowering Women Leaders ... Sixteen Years Strong ...

Yes, WELV Celebrates Its 16th Birthday This Year!

In tandem with this celebration, WELV honors a founding member, Donna Plasket, who is retiring from the faculty at the University of Virginia to join her husband, David Breneman, as he leaves the University to take the helm as president and chief executive officer of The Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, Florida. After more than 40 years in academia, David is set to begin a new phase of his career. From 1995 to 2007, he served as dean of the University's Curry School of Education. He went on to become the founding director of the public policy program at the Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, a position he relinquished in 2009.

Donna Plasket served as co-chair of the first annual conference with fellow faculty member Deborah Verstegen. The conference reached out to women in educational leadership throughout Virginia. The successful event was held on November 13, 1998 at the Boar's Head Inn in Charlottesville. Emerging from the synergy of the conference, a group of women leaders, Deborah and Donna among them, established the Women Education Leaders in Virginia (WELV). The idea was to focus on and support the women in leadership, not just educational issues, as other state and national associations were providing for that need.

David Breneman, as Dean of Curry, embraced the idea of WELV. He offered support, enabled operating and conference funds to be incorporated into the Curry financial structure, and allowed for personnel support and a financial cushion if needed (e.g., when bills needed to be paid before conference revenue had been collected). In addition, he provided the necessary initial subsidy to sustain the early organization and the establishment of WELV. David also attended each conference and offered welcoming remarks at all events requested.

Donna continued to serve on the conference committee and later the board as the organization developed, and then twice served as WELV president. While Donna was conductor of the Virginia Women's Chorus, she brought the singers to perform at the conferences and continued to arrange for performances, even after she handed over the baton. Donna and David also often hosted WELV receptions in their Pavilion I home on the campus of The University of Virginia.

When WELV's Executive Director, Elaine Fogliani, learned of Donna's retirement and move to Florida, she commented, "I am very excited for Donna and David as they embrace the next chapter in their lives. I just can't imagine not having Donna at our conference and at the board meetings. She continues to be such a valuable resource to our organization and a true friend of WELV."

In a recent interview with Donna, we asked what she as one of the visionaries of WELV saw as the major accomplishments of the organization as we celebrate 16 years.

She outlined what she regarded as WELV's principal accomplishments:

- ❖ Carved out a niche focused on women's leadership throughout education, i.e., pre-K through higher education and across professional levels from new teachers to retired superintendents
- ❖ Done a remarkable job as a small organization of sustaining itself and becoming financially viable
- ❖ Has become known for consistently high quality conferences with outstanding networking opportunities
- ❖ Has drawn high profile educational leaders to conferences as speakers and honorees
- ❖ Built and sustained an excellent board of exceptional women working hard and enthusiastically for the organization

WELV expresses sincere gratitude for the vision and support of both Donna and David.

We wish them the very best and hope to see them when they are back in Virginia.