

# McKinley donates \$30,000 for citizenship program

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There is something to be said of a woman who has devoted her life to character building in the lives of area youth. There is even more to be said when her impact has stayed in a lasting way. Such is the case with Norma McKinley.

As a way to honor his late wife and keep her dream alive, retired Judge Michael McKinley formed the Norma E. McKinley program three years ago to provide funding for district schools in the way of citizenship education. The program promotes good behavior during the formative years of fourth through sixth grades. Since its implementation in Taft

Intermediate School in Ashland, it has spread to four county districts — C.E. Budd School of Loudonville in 2017 and Mapleton Elementary School, Hillsdale Elementary and Middle schools this year — prompting McKinley to further invest in the longevity of the program.

McKinley gave a \$30,000 check to the Ashland County Community Foundation to add to the \$10,000 grant endowment fund he established a year ago — the Michael and Norma McKinley Citizenship Education Grants Fund. The money was given in honor of what would have been Norma's 79th birthday.

The fund pools with a \$20,000 endowment fund he opened in 2015 to give districts a \$500 supplement each year for the Citizenship Program. "It's developed into a wonderful program that's involving the entire county, all four school districts," McKinley said. "And they're all developing their own print on it. That was the way it was set up to be."

McKinley's recent addition to the grant endowment fund will also allow districts to apply for grants, typically up to \$1,000, to finance special projects related to character building. "We're really pleased that Mike has created these endowment funds because that will build some sustainability into these programs so hopefully they can continue well into the future," said Jim Cutright, executive director of ACCF.

When McKinley opened the funds with ACCF, he underwrote the framework for the citizenship program, which addresses the basic principles of right and wrong and commends students for their moral integrity. "The fundamental purpose is to help begin the process of young people developing clear understandings of what their duties are as evidenced by the words such as responsibility and respect," McKinley said.

Without prior knowledge, students are awarded at the end of each school year for demonstrating personal character. They are given recognition from their principal and presented with a medal from McKinley, who makes a point to attend all the ceremonies.

Each child honored will have his or her photo placed in a display case that holds a photo of Norma along with information about the program and lighthouses from the McKinleys' beloved collection.

When districts signed up, McKinley gave them each \$5,446.80 as seed money — part of which purchased the cases.

“The whole idea is to not only honor Norma but to have a display case that represents the fact that citizenship is something worth doing and thinking about, that it’s important in life,” McKinley said. “We’re hoping to start early with fourth, fifth and sixth grades with trying to get kids the impression that being a good citizen is a very important part of their life in a country such as ours and then helping to give them a background of what constitutes good citizenship, what constitutes good character, which is required for being a good citizen.”

The program is not different from those Norma voluntarily created during her years in education.

Serving nearly 30 years in Ashland City Schools teaching fourth through sixth grades, she began to notice in the late '60s to early '70s a difference in the behavior and attitude of students and sought to change that. She developed her own form of classroom discipline. One strategy allowed students to determine the rules of the day, present, debate and vote on them to stress fairness and democracy while engraining the importance of right and wrong and abiding by those governing rules.

In the late '70s, she and Michael decided to do something to grow citizenship education in the area. The city school board underwrote a trip for the McKinleys to the University of Cincinnati to take courses within a citizenship education program. Norma later became an adjunct professor for the university, offering courses for teachers and administrators for local districts in Ashland County that would earn a graduate credit. She taught those courses for three to five years. When Michael became a juvenile judge for the Ashland County Juvenile court, he decided to fund a program to curb juvenile delinquency, building a library of resources to aid the court and school districts.

In the '80s, the McKinleys got involved in juvenile delinquent programs similar to “Scared Straight.” Through that, Norma designed and implemented a program, doing workshops and presentations throughout the county and eventually all over Ohio.

She was later recognized by the Ohio State Bar Association in 1979-79, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges in 1985 and the American Lawyers Auxiliary in 1986 and 1989 for her law-related citizenship education. She also appeared in the 1988-89 edition of “Who’s Who in Education.”

When Norma passed in 2014, Annette Shaw, Connie Marble and other members of ACCF’s Women’s Fund Steering committee wanted to honor Norma, who had also devoted many years to the Women’s Fund. After speaking to McKinley, the idea of bringing back Norma’s citizenship education programs came up, and through connections to ACCF and Ashland City Schools, the first Norma E. McKinley Citizenship Awards were born.

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