



by Jackie Perrone

# Mary Walker

For Mary Walker, a look back at 40 years as an educator has to start with her first teaching assignment, at the one-building school in Gilbert, South Carolina in 1977.

One school building housed all the students from kindergarten through 12th grade. That single building morphed, through the years, into four: primary (kindergarten–second grade), elementary (third–fifth grade), middle (sixth–eighth), and high (ninth–12th). The neophyte art teacher gradually moved up into the top ranks of the Lexington One School District, crowning her career with the title of Chief Human Resources Officer for the district.

“That’s right,” she says. “I have spent my entire career in Lexington One, and from day one my focus has been on the students. Everything we do in

school administration is directed toward the best possible education experience for every student.”

Mrs. Walker is winding down that calling now, scheduling her retirement for December of this year. Her years in education have reinforced her strong belief in the power of a teacher. One teacher can change a life, or many lives, with guidance and leadership for young people. The rewards come in watching those youngsters build meaningful lives following their dreams, and she feels she has had plenty of that satisfaction over the years.

She grew up in York, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a Lutheran minister, and gravitated to Newberry College in South Carolina partly because of its strong Lutheran heritage. She majored in elementary education and Spanish, but as she was graduating, her art teacher encouraged her to accept the position teaching art at the Gilbert school. She did that for 10 years, and along the way earned a master of arts in art education and then received an educational specialist degree in educational administration from the University of South Carolina.

In 1987, she became assistant principal at Gilbert Elementary School, and five years later, the first principal of the new Saxe Gotha Elementary School. By 1995, she was on board at Lexington One Central Services, in what was then called personnel, later human resources.

She earned many awards during her career, including South Carolina Personnel Administrator of the Year and the Joseph M. Bedenbaugh Administrator of the Year, among others.

Like many former teachers, Mary Walker misses the class-



room, but she enjoys the wider reach provided at the district level, and likes knowing that she can have influence at all the schools. In her work with human resources, she emphasizes to all new employees that no matter what their assignment, they are to be an exemplary role model to those around them. Walker’s colleagues share her philosophy and praise her dedication. “Exceptional,” “Caring,” “Kind,” and “A wealth of knowledge” are just some of the expressions that have been used to describe her.

As to retirement, she looks forward most to what she calls flexibility, the luxury of calling her time her own and enjoying her six grandchildren, along with her husband William, who is now retired from Lexington County DSS. ■

