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McDonogh 35’s Sylvia Crier marks 56th year as teacher, celebrates 80th birthday

NEW ORLEANS [Sept. 11, 2020] — The lobby of McDonogh 35 Senior High School was filled with smiling faces, tears of joy, Zulu Tramps, and brass band music Wednesday as surprised social studies teacher Sylvia Crier danced her way out of the elevator and into a crowd of cheering friends and peers there to honor Crier’s start of her 56th year as a teacher as well as her recent 80th birthday.

“What an accomplishment to celebrate,” said McDonogh 35 school administrator and McDonogh 35 Class of 2004 alumnus Romero Stewart. “We couldn’t let this pass us by without recognizing how much she means to us.”



Stewart escorted Crier to the center of a spotlighted podium where he, InspireNOLA CEO Jamar McKneely, NOLA Public Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis, Orleans Parish School Board President Ethan Ashley, and McDonogh 35 Alumni Association President Gertrude Ivory sang Crier’s praises.

“Ms. Crier, we can’t thank you enough for your commitment to our youth each and every day,” McKneely said “You have definitely been an inspiration for all of us. We will continue to support you in all the endeavors you are doing.”

Henderson called Crier the “Queen of NOLA Public Schools education,” saluting her for the decades she has dedicated to the students of this city.

Ashley said he wanted to recognize her five decades of service, and hopes she continues for a sixth. “I want to acknowledge the work you’ve done not just for this generation but for so many generations,” he said.

“You’ve given the best of yourself to our students, our staff and our community,” Ivory added. “There is no way we can express what you mean to us.”

Crier, who said she was overwhelmed by the show of love and support, holds the title of being the oldest and longest-teaching educator in the city. And she says she’s far from done.

“I started this journey in 1964 and I’ve been traveling ever since,” she said. “I thank God every day for helping me run this race. I haven’t gotten to the end yet.”

Teaching is a tradition in Crier’s family, and she’s following in the footsteps of her grandmother, mother, and aunts.

“I love seeing the students I taught through the years age, and they are doing so well,” she said. “It makes you feel so good. It’s what keeps me going, and I am going to do it as long as I can.”

With the exception of one year post-Katrina when she worked for FEMA, Crier has spent her entire career in a classroom. She’s been at McDonogh 35 since returning to education in the 2006-07 school year.



“I love it. It’s my passion,” she said. “I say God calls preachers to preach and God called me to teach.”

Throughout the decades, Crier has seen many changes in education, both for the better and worse. But through it all, she persevered and always found a way to provide special experiences for her students, be it taking them to the New York Stock Exchange, to Washington, D.C. to see the government in action, or to see “Hamilton” when the touring company came to New Orleans.

She also believes in providing opportunities for her students to have moments of enlightenment that can cause students to pause, reflect, and change their views, such as having

her class make more than 120 stockings and delivering them to the patients in the nursing home across the street from the school at Christmastime.

“Students realize that could be them some day or someone in their family,” she said. “It makes them rethink how they view the sick or elderly. It changes their mind.”

Crier said one of her desires is to take a group of 10 students to Haiti to do volunteer work for their service hours.

“Our children need to be exposed,” she said. “I think they’d come back renewed.”

Crier said it’s those moments when a child makes a revelation that mean the most to her.

“I get my happiness when I look at a child’s face and see that I’ve got through to him,” she said. “I might not get them the first time, but I’m going to keep trying until I do.”

Perseverance is definitely one of Crier’s defining characteristic. Though she says she “didn’t get into education to teach through a computer,” she is determined to master technology required for distance learning as a result of COVID-19. “And when I do, you better watch out!” she said.



Crier said she has no plans to retire any time soon.

“I’m on a mission. I will know when I’ve reached the finish line, but it’s not yet,” she said. “I’m going to continue teaching until the good Lord tells me to move on, and then I’ll look up and say, ‘Thank you, Lord. It is what it is.’”

But for now, Crier plans to continue to inspire and educate students, encouraging them with words of wisdom from her 80 years of experience.

“Be happy. Treat people like you want to be treated and it will come back to you. The world doesn’t owe you anything. You need to go get it and you CAN go get it,” she said, ending with her signature phrase: “I love you, and there ain’t nothing you can do about it!”

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About InspireNOLA Charter Schools

InspireNOLA Charter Schools operates a network of eight public charter schools in New Orleans, Louisiana. Founded in 2013, InspireNOLA is currently the highest performing open-admission charter management

organization in New Orleans and is the only network with one A-graded school and two B-graded schools. InspireNOLA currently serves more than 5,800 students in prekindergarten through 12th grade.