

Elevations

The latest news and updates from Education Elevators
Fall 2021, Vol. 11



A Note from the Executive Director

By: Allison McJunkin



This October marked the 10th anniversary of the passing of our founder, Tom McJunkin. He was exceptionally passionate about education and believed that there was “no greater mission than the education of our youth.” Education Elevators was what kept him going during the last few years of his battle with cancer. Seeing kids succeed, especially in the face of adversity, was one of his greatest joys. He wanted nothing more than the model he started between Piedmont and Jackson Kelly to be replicated by other schools and businesses. I am incredibly pleased to announce that this fall we added our TENTH business partner! Each business partner is matched with an elementary school or afterschool program. Truist Bank joined Steptoe & Johnson as a new business partner for the Mary C. Snow site of the Bob Burdette Center. In addition, we launched a new partnership between Amherst Madison and Malden Elementary.

When my dad launched the program 13 years ago, mentoring was important. Now in a post pandemic world with more families struggling to make ends meet and the opioid epidemic still ravaging communities, it’s critical. In the wake of the Covid shutdowns, kids are struggling academically, socially and emotionally. For many kids, school offered the only safe space for them to go and the only place where they had stable and nurturing relationships. Even more troubling, suicides rates have spiked and an alarming number of kids are reporting suicidal thoughts. Many are having trouble interacting with others. Connection is a major component of resiliency and fortunately, we were able to relaunch our programs in person with all our partner schools and afterschool programs this fall. We now have programs in 9 elementary schools in Kanawha and Berkeley Counties. At a recent orientation, the principal of Mary C. Snow Elementary, Destiny Spencer, commented, “Wow, just wow. This is going to be amazing for our students!” In response, the school coordinator said, “It’s Education Elevators! I get to play Santa and I’m grateful and honored.”

We also now have Elevators in 5 middle schools. Our program technically ends after elementary school, but we know how important these relationships are and how much students need Elevators in middle school. Many of our Elevators have been with their students since kindergarten. Last year, we supported relationships remotely. This year, we connected Elevators with their students in middle school so that they can continue to be a source of support and encouragement for them. This might take the form of weekly mentoring sessions or attending awards assemblies or sporting events. Elevators can let the student know about opportunities at the school (like robotics clubs) and encourage them to participate (many of them do not have other adult figures who would do that). The school can also reach out to the Elevator if the student’s grades are slipping or if he or she is being bullied or peer pressured to use drugs or engage in other delinquent activities.

I am pleased with the progress we have made over the past ten years since the loss of our founder. I am grateful beyond words to all of you that have supported our program over the years. We would not be able to accomplish our goals without you.

We still have a lot of work to do and I hope that you will join me in helping continue the legacy that my father started. Together we can make a difference in the lives of the kids that need it most. They are our future and, with your support, we can make it brighter for all of us.

Best Wishes for a Safe and Happy Holiday Season,

Allison McJunkin

Tom McJunkin’s Legacy: Paying It Forward for West Virginia Student

By: Colleen Anderson

Humans react to adversity in many ways. Some retreat and give up. Some fight back against unbeatable odds. A wise and generous few, like Tom McJunkin, cast a lifeline into the future for others. Ten years after his death, his gifts to children keep on giving.

In 2007, in his capacity as a partner in the law firm of Jackson Kelly, Tom had volunteered for over 20 years at Charleston’s Piedmont Elementary School, reading to children through Read Aloud. He enjoyed it, and so did the children, but he sensed that some needed more than an enjoyable group experience.

Steve Knighton, then the principal at Piedmont Elementary, remembers what came next: “Tom realized that we could do some other things that would be more beneficial than just reading to kids. He convinced his managing partners to volunteer the time for people to do a one-on-one mentorship with these kids.”

McJunkin chose the name Education Elevators for the new program, and that’s just what the mentors did, according to Knighton: “You take a single child and, even though they’re struggling, give them encouragement, build on their successes. You lift them up.”

“Many of our kids did not have a supportive family unit. It may have been for legitimate reasons: Mom was working two jobs, there was a grandmother raising two kids, whatever. They lacked someone to reinforce the positives in their lives.

“These kids, they just soaked up this stuff. And they became the stars in the classroom! Maybe not academically, but anybody who did not have an Elevator was jealous.

“Tom shepherded this thing through its infancy. Tom walked the walk. It wasn’t just words. He would come to our meetings. He would throw out suggestions that we didn’t even imagine possible.”

And he recruited others. Before long, dozens of Jackson Kelly’s partners and employees were mentoring students at Piedmont. Knighton recalls, “Success breeds success, and Tom’s mission was to get as many mentors into the school system as possible. It grew and grew. We would hold a luncheon, and there would be fifty mentors in the school. It just blossomed.

“Tom was the virtuoso behind this. He orchestrated this entire meaningful event. Even when he was struggling [with cancer], he never failed to show up.”

[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE>>](#)

Education Elevators was just featured in the Charleston Gazette!
Click [HERE](#) to read it if you missed it

OUR ELEVATORS AND STUDENTS ARE THRILLED TO BE MEETING IN PERSON AGAIN

Here are just a few photos of some of our new matches!



Gobble Gobble

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