

## Letter from the Editor - A lifelong educator

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**Prince Frederick, MD** - We are barely into 2017 and already my home county of Calvert has lost two of its most prominent figures. Both I could call friends. Both deserve their own appreciations. Today's appreciation is for Dr. Gene Karol.

It was 1980 when Gene Karol came to Calvert, the same year I moved here. What he did during his tenure as superintendent of schools was quite amazing. He remained in the community and continued to be a significant presence. In fact, maybe it was that post-superintendent activism that was more impressive. What I have learned, however, is that his life was pretty extraordinary before he even got here.

About two years ago, we were sitting at the same table at Stoney's in Prince Frederick. The occasion was the local Rotary Club's scholarship presentation. He always invited and encouraged members of the local press to attend. On the restaurant wall was a black and white photo of a group of professional crab pickers sitting at a table with an older looking gentleman who was wearing a suit. Being a lifelong Marylander, I knew the man in the suit was Millard Tawes, who was governor from 1959 to 1967. "I bet a lot of people who eat here have no idea who that man is," I said to Gene. "Oh, I knew him very well," said Gene. "He was a good man." Dr. Karol recalled his days as a teacher in another Maryland county and his service in the state teachers' organization. Tawes' tenure as governor was highlighted by his advocacy of improving Maryland's education system. I remarked, "I guess Tawes will always be the answer to the trivia question 'who was Maryland's governor before Agnew' [I have may said Agnew's name in a pejorative tone]." Gene replied, "oh, I knew him very well, too. He was a good man." Dr. Karol recalled how Spiro "Ted" Agnew, a Republican, became the preferred candidate of Maryland's rank-and-file teachers in the 1966 election and Gene played a significant role in a group called "Teachers for Ted." Agnew won a close, three-way race that November and two years later Richard Nixon selected him as his running mate in the 1968 Presidential Election. While his career crashed in 1973 Agnew arguably had a memorable run in the national political spotlight. It's hard to say for certain, but the support of the teachers in 1966 might have nudged him into the governor's mansion.

Fortunately for Calvert County and the world, Spiro T. Agnew wasn't the only one whose life was enriched by Gene Karol. His leadership helped shape the career paths of many teachers and administrators. Support staff also found an ally. The school system employees passed that positivity on to many students. Some of those students are teachers in Calvert County today. People moved to Calvert because of its rising stature in public education back in the 1980s and 90s. While not everyone was happy about the growth, it did bring more good people to the area.

When most superintendents leave office they get out town. Gene Karol never left Calvert and he never stopped teaching. This man who had rubbed elbows with some powerful people seemed to be the most content when he handed out dictionaries to local elementary students along with his fellow Rotarians. He loved the club's consistency and hard work in awarding scholarships and always lamented that they didn't have the funds to award more.

On YouTube there's a brief video of young Gene Karol circa 1969 being interviewed by a television newsman as a spokesman for the National Education Association. Gene uses the word "profession" numerous times in the clip (I counted 14). I believe he was trying to emphasize that it was important for all educators to hold themselves to exemplary standards or find another line of work. He was consistently sincere about that throughout his amazing life. It's why his leadership was such a change-agent for Calvert County's amazing quality of life.

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