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Walkertown Middle media center receives recognition

By Mary Giunca



When Gina Webster took over as media coordinator at Walkertown Middle School in 2000, she found the offerings needed more than a bit of updating.

The average copyright date of print materials was 1961, and there were such titles as "Let's Visit the USSR" and "We Live in West Germany," she said.

One book contained the sentence: "Someday we will go to the moon."

Webster got to work, writing proposals for grants and meeting with the Walkertown PTA for help with matching grants. In the years since, she has helped the media center get almost \$1 million in

grants to buy new materials. Today, it is an inviting, colorful place, with books spread out on tables and irreverent displays of stuffed animals wearing sombreros.

"A library has to be a continually living and breathing environment," Webster said.

Webster's work to make the media center the heart of the school earned the school an unusual honor yesterday, when Nancy Everhart, the president of the American Association of School Librarians, made Walkertown Middle the only North Carolina stop on a nationwide tour of outstanding school libraries.

There are about 100,000 school libraries in the United States, Everhart said, and she will visit 35 this year during her tour.

The libraries on the tour were selected by their state's library association, Everhart said.

It is important that people understand that you don't have to live in a big city or have a big budget to have a good library, Everhart said. It takes the school community working together on programs that are creative and that reach out to everyone.

Being a librarian at the middle-school level requires creativity, patience and a dash of zaniness, Everhart said.

As part of the program the school created for Everhart, students did a rap of Dr. Seuss' "Green Eggs and Ham."

Principal Piper Hendrix said the media center is a forum for discussion and debate at the school.

"It's the place everyone wants to be," she said.

Webster was chosen media coordinator of the year in 2010 for the N.C. School Library Media Association.

She sets up focus groups that help her understand what different students want from the library. Boys, who tend to use middle school libraries less than girls, have told her that they want books with lots of dialogue, action and real people, not description.

When new books arrive, she sets up what she calls a "book explosion," with the array of books laid out on a table so that students can come in and see them.

"It always created new energy and new excitement when there's new books," she said.

Her Reading Passport Program allows children to collect points by reading books, doing book reviews and taking quizzes about what they read. Prizes include special themed luncheons.

"The students who make it to our luncheons are not always the honor-roll students," Webster said. "Sometimes students who struggle in school are the very ones we've managed to win over and who are reading avidly because they want to be part of the reading culture we foster. That's

a huge victory in education."

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