

Lifelong Educator Gaskin Dies at 78

By **CHRISTINE MACKINNON**
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St. Mary's County lost one of its most beloved and influential leaders last Wednesday.

Elvare Gaskin died at her home on Dec. 10, at the age of 78.

She spent much of her life teaching children in St. Mary's County. She retired from the school system in 1985 after 46 years of service, but her involvement with children and schools did not stop there.

As recently as two days before her death, Gaskin was tutoring children at Carver Elementary School.

"I peeked in and saw she was working intently with some of the children," recalled Principal Janice Walthour. "I didn't even say 'hi' because she was working so intently."

Gaskin was one of the volunteer tutors from Zion United Methodist Church, which entered into a partnership with the school this year, Walthour said.

"I kind of believe she took on tutoring to motivate the other people in the program," Walthour said.

Even with just a few months at the school, Gaskin touched the lives of the students. Walthour said students drew pictures and wrote poems that were displayed at the prayer services for Gaskin.

"She really made an impression on them," Walthour said.

One boy drew a cheerleader, and when Walthour asked him why, he replied, "Because cheerleaders are pretty."

"That's how he saw her, as someone cheering him on, encouraging him," Walthour said.

Gaskin was born in Scotland in 1919, daughter of the late Mary B. Smith Hewlett and Robert J. Smith. She attended Scotland Elementary School and the Cardinal Gibbons Institute.

Because there was no high school for blacks in St. Mary's County at that time, Gaskin had to travel to Charles County to attend Pomonkey High School, where she graduated in 1936. She earned a teaching certificate from Bowie State College, and a bachelor of science in elementary education from Morgan State University.

Gaskin also pursued graduate studies at George Washington University, the University of Maryland and Bowie State, and earned an advanced teaching certificate in special education.

Gaskin began her teaching career at the Gravelly Knoll School in Oakville, where she taught first through sixth grade. She also taught elementary school at St. Inigoes School, Jarboesville School and Carver Elementary School. She was tapped to serve as the coordinator of special education at Felix Johnson

School, and later served as principal of Green Holly School. At the time of her retirement in 1985, she was a pupil personnel worker for the school system.

Gaskin was also an active member of her church. She joined St. Luke United Methodist Church in Scotland at an early age, and later transferred to Zion United Methodist Church in Lexington Park. She served on many church committees over the years, including the administrative council, the parish relations committee, the nurturing ministries committee, the adult choir, board of trustees and the United Methodist Women.

Gaskin was also a past and present member of many community organizations including the board of directors for the St. Mary's County Developmental Center, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Committee to Promote Employment for the Handicapped, the St. Mary's Hospital Auxiliary, Fidelity Chapter #60, Order of Eastern Star PHA, the Delicatos and the Maryland State Retired Teachers Association.

She received numerous awards, including a nomination as one of the Outstanding and Distinguished Community Leaders of America in 1971.

She was married to the late Robert Gaskin, and is survived by five children, 11 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, one great-great grandchild, and many other relatives and friends.