Melba Shewmaker, Preston Bynum to be Honored

Community Leaders Will Receive Honorary Degrees at May 19 Commencement

BENTONVILLE, Ark. (April 23, 2013) – NorthWest Arkansas Community College will present community philanthropist Melba J. Shewmaker and higher education advocate Preston Bynum with honorary associate degrees at the College’s May 19 commencement.

Shewmaker will receive an honorary Associate of Humanitarian Service, and Bynum will receive an honorary Associate of Educational Service. Commencement exercises are scheduled for 2 p.m. May 19 at the John Q. Hammons Center in Rogers.

Shewmaker and her family made their home in Bentonville in 1970. For many years, her husband, Jack Shewmaker, was a driving force for the growth and development in Northwest Arkansas as an entrepreneur and advocate for education with Melba supporting him behind the scenes. Together, the two have supported such projects as the Arend Arts Center at Bentonville High School, Mercy Health Physicians Plaza, and the Shewmaker Center for Workforce Technologies and the Shewmaker Center for Global Business Development (both at NWACC).

After Jack Shewmaker passed away in 2010, the torch they carried for improving the lives of others passed to Melba. She has continued the work the couple began and is active in a variety of community organizations. She is a member of the Bentonville Garden Club and also works with others to serve meals at Samaritan Community Center in Rogers. She is a supporter of Boy Scouts, Circle of Life Hospice and Enactus, a global community of student, academic and business leaders committed to using the power of entrepreneurial action to transform lives. Last year she partnered with Mercy Health to establish the Shewmaker Family Medical Campus in Bella Vista, and that campus is now under construction.

Melba Shewmaker’s love for education and children inspired her to assist in a campaign to transform the former Highlands Oncology building owned by the NWACC Foundation into a state-of-the-art training center. The Melba Shewmaker Southern Region National Child Protection Training Center will be dedicated to the training of teaching of teachers, social workers, law enforcement, attorneys,
child care professionals, health professionals and many others. The mission of the center is to eradicate child abuse by training these current and future child protection professionals to recognize, report and respond to victims of abuse.

Scott Street, president and chief executive officer of Mercy Health System of Northwest Arkansas, nominated Melba Shewmaker for the honorary degree.

Mrs. Shewmaker said she is honored and humbled to receive the honorary degree. “I can recall when early on, College leaders were excited at the opportunity to have classes in the old telephone office in Bentonville. It’s been a pleasure to be connected with NWACC. I was familiar with the ‘college without walls’ and it’s been wonderful to watch it grow and increase its offerings to the community."

She said she and her late husband have known NWACC President Becky Paneitz for the 10 years she has served the institution. “Becky has been a dear friend,” she said. Paneitz will retire at the end of June after 10 years of service as the college’s chief executive.

“NWACC offers the opportunity to so many people in the area to further their education,” she said, “and I am deeply thankful for being thought of for this degree. I appreciate the recognition and the opportunity to celebrate with others the difference the college has made in so many lives.”

Bynum served in the Arkansas House of Representatives from 1969 through December 1980. He also served as Gov. Frank White’s chief of staff from 1981 to 1983. In recent years he has worked tirelessly to advocate for NorthWest Arkansas Community College and has provided assistance and guidance as the college navigated the legislative process and fought for issues important to NWACC such as equity funding, competitive salaries and other higher education priorities.

Keven Anderson, who served in the Arkansas State Legislature from 2002 to 2008, nominated Bynum for the Associate of Educational Service degree. “Preston is a true statesman and is always a pleasure to work with,” Anderson wrote in the nomination. “His calm demeanor and deep knowledge base made him someone whose opinion I truly valued and always trusted.”

Bynum said NWACC is well respected around the state and gives credit to College President Paneitz.

"I love that college,” Bynum said. “Dr. Paneitz has been a jewel in this state, and she will be missed when she retires. A lot of legislators and office-holders at the Capitol have a lot of respect for NWACC because of what it’s been able to accomplish in Northwest Arkansas with so little state funding. Believe me, that has not gone unnoticed in this building.”

NorthWest Arkansas Community College is a smart choice for students wanting to pursue quality higher education. As an accredited institution through The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, NWACC is a public two-year institution that serves and strengthens its surrounding communities in Benton and Washington counties by helping our students maximize their potential and exceed expectations. With state-of-the-art facilities, NWACC provides excellent academic instruction and workforce training needed to succeed, offering personalized attention from highly respected faculty, staff, and administrators. For more information, visit www.nwacc.edu.