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EDITOR'S PICK

Pace to be inducted into Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame

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Wilma Pace

The late Wilma Pace of Hardin, will be inducted into the Louie B. Nunn Kentucky Teacher Hall of Fame at Western Kentucky University on Friday, Nov. 4. She will be honored for her career teaching within the Marshall County school system, benefitting many students with her desire to teach and passion to learn.

Pace was nominated by her children, Carolyn Johnson and Douglas Pace, who benefited from her mentorship at home as well as in the classroom.

Pace was born in Hardin in 1920, beginning her academic journey at five years old by entering the first-grade at Hardin School in 1925. Despite her young age, she was a fast learner and rose to the top of her class. Teachers were quick to notice her abilities and decided that she would skip the second grade due to her ease in grasping the curriculum and persevere through any challenge.

Pace graduated from Hardin School at 16 years old and enrolled in college at Murray State Teachers College, now Murray State University, in 1936. Starting college so young held its own challenges, but she embraced them readily, as seemed to be a theme throughout her life. She graduated college in 1940 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in secondary education and minoring in French.



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Fresh out of college, Pace accepted her first teaching position in Crofton, Kentucky, where she taught high school business courses at just 20 years old. She taught for one year before marrying her high school sweetheart Dwight Pace and moved to Talladega, Alabama, taking a break from teaching to focus on family.

Resuming her teaching career and moving back home, Pace returned to Hardin in 1946, teaching a combined seventh and eighth grade class until 1949, when she began teaching a combined fourth and fifth grade class, with her daughter as one of her students.

Marshall County schools began consolidating in 1956 and Pace joined the South Marshall High School faculty as a sophomore and junior English teacher in 1958. As an excellent teacher and storyteller, the grammar and English literature classroom is where she hit her stride, making the classroom come alive.

“She was really all about helping people reach their greatest potential, and had a goal to instill a love for learning in her students,” said Douglas Pace.

“She could fill a whole chalkboard diagramming sentences and she could help people understand the importance of poetry, and why, in Marshall County, William Shakespeare is someone they need to be aware of. That was her gift.”

Pace was asked to teach French in 1961, despite having not looked at a French book since 1940, and accepted the challenge, as was her way, and diligently prepared and taught the curriculum with fervor.

In spite of a busy class schedule, Pace also always took a leadership role in extracurricular activities.

“During her tenure at the high school level, again she was more than a teacher. She cast, costumed and directed the school plays. If there was a school program that required a skit, she wrote it. She was a sponsor of the Beta Club, Student Council, adviser to the yearbook, and more. She also mentored many student teachers,” wrote her children, Johnson and Douglas Pace.

In 1974, the Marshall County schools consolidated again to form one high school. Pace opted to stay at South Marshall Middle School and teach ninth-grade English until retiring in 1982, with 29 years of service.

“She never dreaded going to work. She looked forward to every day, getting up, going to school and teaching,” commented Johnson.

For her 90th birthday, Pace’s family wanted to do something special and host a birthday party, inviting former students and colleagues to attend and celebrate their teacher. There was an overwhelming amount of support with many attendees, even 80 years after she had stepped into her first classroom. Her children say they are still approached by her former students and colleagues who note the impact she had on their learning, and whose lives have been forever changed by knowing her.

Pace took a personal interest in every one of her students, possessing the unique ability to be stern, while maintaining a friendship with them. She passed away on Jan. 3, 2012 at 92 years old, but her impact lives on.

Only three teachers are inducted into the hall of fame each year, and though Pace retired in 1982, the board was so moved by her story and evidenced impact through several letters of nomination, they chose to honor her, postmortem. Her family is pleased that her hard work and exceptional abilities are being recognized, and believe she would be as well.

“I think she would be really thrilled and honored, and say there were a lot of other teachers who were equally deserving,” commented Douglas Pace. “She would have been so appreciative of the honor. She worked so hard to build personal relationships with her students and enjoyed watching them grow.”

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