

## NEWS RELEASE

By Marie R. Harris

Danville Community College's Alumni Association announced *2010 Outstanding Alumni* honorees after the Foundation Board meeting May 10. Three reside in Danville and Pittsylvania County and one from Dry Fork, Virginia, now resides in Maryland. Honorees include Shelby J. Irving, Danville's Fire Marshal; Steven K. Jones, senior electronics engineer with the Federal Communications Commission in Maryland; Ray S. Robinson, retired English Department Chairman and English instructor at George Washington High School; and James "Mack" Doss, retiree from the City of Danville, who is presently affiliated with Norris Funeral Services.

"Honorees, chosen by the Recognition and Scholarship Committee of the Alumni Council from 76,000 alumni, have consistently served their communities and their fields of employment with distinction," said Buddy Rawley, DCC Educational Foundation director. "Their accomplishments and their lives are shining examples to our present students."

Two honorees yearly are Danville Community College alumni from the years since the college's creation in 1966. Adding to these two, the third honoree is from Virginia Polytechnic Institute-Danville and the fourth honoree is from Danville Technical Institute. VPI-Danville and Danville Technical Institute were the colleges that were developed into Danville Community College, one of the four original Virginia community colleges.

Shelby Irving, an honoree who graduated from DCC in its Fire Science Program had already received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1984 with a major in Recreational /Leisure Services from Ferrum College when she entered DCC. During her years at Ferrum, she played both basketball and softball and was an outstanding student, often recruiting for the college. Upon her return to Danville, she followed her love of basketball and softball, coaching both sports at Averett University for 15 years while also pursuing a career.

Three years after returning to Danville, Irving decided to go in a different direction with her career. Hired by the Danville Fire Department in 1987, she became the first female firefighter hired in the city. Nine years later, her abilities and dedication earned her the *1996 Outstanding Young Fire fighter of the Year* honor. Ten years later, she was honored by American Legion Post 1097 as the *2006 Fire fighter of the Year*. Already holding a four-year degree, she was encouraged during this ten-year period to enroll in DCC's Fire Science curriculum, which would mean a five-year program during off hours with the Fire Department.

That commitment of five years often created a juggling act. "I didn't work one job; at times I was working three," Irving said. Beyond her classes at DCC and her full-time job, Irving continued coaching basketball at Averett University and helping with some recreational activities for the Danville Parks and Recreation Department.

At the same time, she made the President's List for exceptional grades at DCC, was inducted into the honor society, Phi Theta Kappa, and set a personal goal of graduating *Summa Cum Laude*. She said, "I was just short of the GPA that was required for *Summa Cum Laude*. I had enough credit hours to graduate in the fall semester, but I was too close to not achieve the goal. I enrolled in one class to meet the needed GPA. And I graduated *Summa Cum Laude in 2005* with an Associate in Applied Science with a major in Technical Studies-Fire Science.

Never forgetting Ferrum, she accepted a position on their Alumni Board and still drives the distance today to serve the college when meetings occur. A volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, with youth groups at her church, she fills every minute. "I'm not married; I don't have

children, so I have the time to give to a number of organizations, time some others don't have," Irving explained.

Irving has been with the Fire Department 23 years; in 2007 she became Danville's Fire Marshal, an accomplishment brought about by years of hard work, dedication to skill building and perseverance. She has volunteered with *National Night Out*, was honored as the *Bank of America Neighborhood Champion 2005*, and has been Treasurer and Finance Secretary for 15 years at Jones Chapel Baptist Church where she is also a Co- Advisor—Youth Leader.

Currently she is enrolled in the *Leadership Southside Class* and hosts the local television show *Fire Watch* on Comcast Channel 20.

An avid supporter of her colleges, Irving not only serves on Ferrum's Alumni Board, two years ago she agreed to also serve on the DCC Alumni Council, giving countless hours of service at lunch time, at night and on weekends. She was present at the DCC Homecoming, operating the Fire House for children as part of her service to the community.

Danville Community College's second honoree is Steven K. Jones, a Dry Fork, Virginia native, who returned to DCC because of a recommendation from a professor at John Tyler Community College in Richmond. That professor told Jones, who had been taking classes while working full time, that he needed to be in an engineering program with his skill in mathematics.

"I came to DCC because I knew it had the best pre-engineering program in the state in a community college; and I could live at home as well as work locally," Jones explained. In 1980, Jones returned to his home region, enrolled at DCC, and worked for Electronic Design and Sales, a local firm, full time.

After receiving an associate degree in both engineering and business administration from DCC in 1982, he enrolled at Louisiana State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering. Upon attaining his four-year degree, he was employed for eleven years as an electronics engineer with ITT Research Institute in Annapolis, Maryland, where he was responsible, as a team member of engineers, for development and deployment of a nationwide network of 148 NEXRAD Doppler weather radars.

In 1996 after having earned a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University, he accepted a civil service appointment to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration within the U.S. Commerce Department. There he headed a project associated with the modernization of the Global Positioning System (GPS).

In 1998 he was awarded the *Department of Commerce Silver Medal Award* and in 2000 was named by the Department of State as a member of the U. S. delegation to the International Telecommunication Union (a United Nations agency). Since the 9/11 attacks, he has worked for the FCC laboratory in Columbia, Maryland, and with the FBI, assessing potential terrorist threats to aeronautical GPS receivers from intentional electromagnetic interference.

With the public, he has been involved in introducing ultra-wideband communications, ground penetrating and through-the-wall radar systems, satellite digital audio radio (Sirius and XM radio) and new airport security portals utilizing radar technology.

A *Washington Post* article in 2008 focused on his work involving providing wireless Internet access to underserved areas of the nation. "Only about sixty percent of our citizens have access to the Internet," Jones explained. "If you don't have access to the Internet, you often can't even apply for a job, since so many job applications go through the Internet today. That's why we are trying to create access for the other forty percent. We've been attempting to set up wireless solutions—to set up an infrastructure without fiber optic cable, which is so prohibitively expensive for rural areas."

As a proponent of the community college experience, Jones has been working with the Boy Scouts of America program for over a dozen years. “I tell them about the lower costs, about how they can experiment with majors at a lower cost if they don’t know what they want to do with their lives, about the smaller classes and the attention from professors, how professors structure the classes, slowing down or moving rapidly according to students’ needs. That is not possible in a 400 student audience in the universities.”

Ray S. Robinson is the honoree from VPI-Danville. He taught high school English and mentored both students and beginning teachers for most of his career, which included instruction at Dan River High School in Pittsylvania County and George Washington High School in Danville. While at Dan River High, he guided student activities including the Beta Club, Forensics and the Student Government Association.

In 1985-86 Robinson co-taught, without pay, a five month class for English teachers in the Danville City Schools on how to teach composition at all skills levels, based on the training he received in the National Writing Project during a summer fellowship underwritten by the Virginia Division of the Humanities. “I really believe this beginning has paid off over the years,” Robinson said. “Teachers taught other teachers, shared methods—methods they often weren’t taught in their college classes. We got together in afternoon workshops and discussed what worked.”

Before his retirement, he led the English department at George Washington High School as chairman for over ten years, the years when the state imposed SOL testing. GW, because of his leadership of the English instructors, consistently met and exceeded high scores on the English SOL composition section and on the written test in a region where many students struggle with economic deprivation. The pass rate and high score for the high school in composition the first year of state testing was so dramatic that he was asked by State Department of Education leadership to present methods used at GWHS to other teachers from across the state at a training session in Richmond.

Robinson’s tireless efforts to expose students from all walks of life to areas in Danville of unique interest architecturally, historically and educationally led to numerous field trips citywide as well as instate, often leaving him without weekends in which to recuperate. Because of his efforts, the English Department continued to field not one but two Advanced Placement English programs while also serving the struggling learner with programs that met their needs.

A proponent of excellence, his department had three consistently award-winning publications programs that were known locally, nationally, and statewide. He lobbied administrators and school board members unceasingly on behalf of English instructional needs. During his tenure, the consistent use of technology in the English classroom expanded as he supported teachers’ constant elevation of classroom methods.

When Robinson retired, he continued to mentor teachers, going back into the high school to guide those in their first years with his experience and wisdom about how to best meet the needs in the classroom. This year he was still mentoring.

He is a consummate writer, who edited the *DCC History* as it was being written over a two-year period with dedication and tireless feedback on the copy, giving back to his college without thought about the endless revisions back and forth and the time it was taking from his life. In the past two years, he conducted research and participated in editing a second book, the *History of First Baptist Church*. “We spent a lot of time working in the committee on this book and occasionally looking at the *DCC History* for some guidance,” Robinson explained. “The

church's history was published on time, in 2009 during the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church's establishment," he added.

Beyond the classroom, he is a musician, well known for his skill at piano and organ, a leader at First Baptist Church giving countless hours, having served as head of deacons, and a tireless proponent of the best in education, leading the Danville Education Association and speaking for children's interests throughout four years as president of the association. Presently he is enjoying his life-long interest in history, serving as vice-president of the Museum Guild of the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History.

James "Mack" Doss is the honoree from Danville Technical Institute. A 1961 graduate, he explained that DTI "was close to home and gave me the chance to complete an accounting program in one year. Ever since, I have been a supporter of this college—I consider it home."

Throughout his career, he has been involved with finance and local governmental operations with First Virginia Bank South for eleven years and as director of the city's Utility Customer Service Division. Upon retirement from the city in 2003, he chose to give back to his community through working with families facing the worst of situations--a death in the family--by agreeing to part-time work with Norris Funeral Home. Today he works at their Mt. Hermon chapel where he is office manager and funeral assistant.

In the community, he has been a volunteer with the Danville Cancer Association, working with those facing a battle with the disease and how to approach that battle. He has worked with the March of Dimes Foundation and been a member of the Riverview Rotary Club, the American Heart Association, the Pittsylvania County Chapter of the American Red Cross and the Danville Concert Association.

His greatest volunteer enjoyment has been time spent as a member of the board of the Pittsylvania County Historical Society. After a presentation to school children at the original county clerk's office in 1979, Doss decided that other citizens should see the restored facility.

From his efforts and those of long-time friends Frances Hurt, Norman Amos and Virginia Chapin was born the Autumn Potpourri festival at the restored clerk's office at Callands. The festival now draws 6,000 to 7,000 visitors, who view 75-80 demonstrations of colonial occupations including blacksmithing, chair caning, spinning, basket weaving, quilting, and candle wicking.

The first festival was held in 1980; in 2000 the project was honored by the Library of Congress as a Local Legacy Project, an outcome that began with Doss's efforts. In June, 1991, Doss received the Sertoma Club of Danville's *Service to Mankind Award* and in 2005 was presented the *Masonic Community Builders Award* by the Morotock Lodge of Danville.

Beyond his devotion to his granddaughters, Caroline and Madelyn, he is involved in the music program at Mt. Hermon Baptist Church where he sings in the adult choir and is a member of the adult handbell choir. For many years, he sang in the *Ambassador's Quartet* with his friends—Donald Merricks, Ronald Merricks and Woody Thigpen.

Throughout the years, Doss has been a devoted graduate of the college, serving on the DCC Foundation Board and recently joining the Alumni Council. These responsibilities mean that he gives up lunch, shows up at night and on weekends, not for pay but for the chance to make a difference in the community. He works tirelessly promoting the college and working on Foundation initiatives. Both of his children are DCC alumni, a fitting tribute to Doss's continued belief in the college and its mission.