



The Impact of Community Matriarchs on Local Issues

The article below is submitted on behalf of Della Sherrod’s children and grandchildren. It is also featured in the February 2025 issue of “Welcome to Tarboro Magazine.”

Della Sherrod was indeed a pillar of strength within the Speed community and Edgecombe County. As a devoted mother of eight children, she proudly celebrated the remarkable achievement of seeing six children graduate from Conetoe High School and two from North Edgecombe after Conetoe closed in 1971. Her children’s

accomplishments—Clifton, Jr. (1963, deceased), Mittie (1964), Henry (1966, deceased), Cornelious (1968, deceased), Vernell (1970), Nathaniel (1971), James (1973), and Nonnie (1975)—reflect Della's enduring legacy.

Article from Tarboro Magazine – February 2025 Issue

Written by Anna Hinton

Della Fleetwood-Sherrod left behind a legacy that stretched far beyond her eighth-grade education, fighting successfully to keep a rural North Carolina school open and spending decades as her community’s unofficial caretaker.

In the 1970s, when Edgecombe County officials threatened to close the only elementary school serving the region, Della transformed from a community volunteer into an unstoppable force for change. Despite her limited formal education and equipped only with her passion and determination, she orchestrated a grassroots campaign that resonated widely. Her efforts made significant impacts at local school board meetings, state legislatures, and even in the halls of Congress. During school board meetings, residents often remarked, “Here comes Ms. Della; they better watch out. She is not going to let them off the hook!” Her persistent advocacy kept the school open for over four decades until its eventual permanent closure in 2012.

But education was just one chapter in her story of service. Della was a true guardian angel for her community, tending to sick neighbors, assisting elderly residents with personal care, and ensuring that homebound citizens made it to vital medical and social service appointments. Her selfless dedication earned her the N.C. Medallion Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service in 2008, presented by the North Carolina Governor’s office.

“She embodied selfless love in every sense,” her family

reflects, sharing anecdotes that paint the picture of a woman who translated compassion into action. Whether she was spending nights with ailing neighbors or navigating the complexities of bureaucracy to safeguard her community’s future, Della’s spirit shone brightly. Her advocacy for equal access to education predated the greater movement, marking her as a visionary in her rural community—a true testament to the power of one individual’s unwavering commitment to the greater good.

Although Della passed away at the age of 97 late last year, her family started the Della Fleetwood-Sherrod Humanitarian Scholarship two years ago to keep her legacy alive. This scholarship aims to perpetuate her extraordinary concern for the welfare of individuals in her community. It provides financial assistance to low-income students with a high school diploma or GED who seek to enroll in a post-secondary educational institution, training program, or trade school. Ideal candidates exemplify a commitment to community service and acknowledge the moral obligation of helping those in need. To date, the family has awarded three scholarships to deserving high school seniors in Edgecombe and surrounding counties, totaling \$3,500.

The deadline to apply for this year’s scholarship is April 26, 2025. For more information about the scholarship, including how to apply, please visit this link: <https://bold.org/scholarships/della-fleetwood-sherrod-humanitarian-scholarship/>

Sherrod receives Medallion Award

Page 1

From left, Shannon Barker, community impact coordinator with Rocky Mount Area United Way, Della Sherrod of Speed, recipient of the 2007 North Carolina Medallion Award, and Speed Mayor Wilbert Harrison. Sherrod was presented her medallion Friday. Sherrod, 80, received the award for her outstanding volunteer service.



Della L.
Fleetwood-Sherrod

James

Henry

Cornelius

Nathaniel

Vernell

Nonnie

Clifton



Her Legacy Lives on in the **Family** she Cherished



Mittie

A Pillar of Strength within the Speed Community and Edgecombe County