

Teachers...from Page 1

administrators, who then turn the voting over to their staff in a schoolwide vote.

Selecting a System Teacher of the Year this year was up to a panel of three individuals who decided among those already chosen as TOTY for their respective schools.

That panel included Dr. April Nelms of the University of North Georgia, Dr. Mark Brunner of Young Harris College, and last year's system TOTY, Jeanne Maddaleni, who is a writing teacher at the elementary school.

The person they chose was Covington, now in her 15th year as choral director at the high school.

"There are so many teachers that deserve Teacher of the Year just as much or more than I do, so it makes me feel so very honored and

humbled that my peers and my administration would give me this honor," said Covington. "I do not do what I do for any glory. God and my students make my program what it is – I'm just one piece of the puzzle."

This is the first year Covington's name has appeared on a TOTY ballot, but in all her years of teaching, she has maintained the same student-centered teaching philosophy.

"I learned so much in college, but I learn so much more from my students each and every day," said Covington, who has a bachelor's and a master's degree in music. "One way of teaching something that makes total sense to me doesn't necessarily mean my students understand it, so I keep trying until they get it. I also respect my students, and in turn, they respect me and we all work well together.

"I want each of my students to leave my choral program with a love of music that will stay with them all throughout their lives. To quote one of our favorite songs (from *Wicked the Musical*), that 'because I knew you, I have been changed for good.'"

When Covington started teaching chorus, she had just 22 students. Now, she has more than 130 filling her rosters.

"And I still keep in touch with students from my first year of teaching," said Covington. "I care about my students and what they are going through. If you walk in my classroom, you won't see students sitting nice and quiet in a chair – it's noisy, full of life and quite chaotic, just like a huge family would be.

"We play games together to get to know each other, and learn to trust one another. Of course, we learn music. I think my choral program is fairly unique. My students learn to read music, sing the classical choral literature, in addition to foreign languages, Jazz, Pop, musicals – just about anything you can think of.

"The chorus participates in the Georgia Music Educators Association Large Group Performance Evaluation each year, I have students who attend GMEA 9th District Honor Choir, and have students compete and attend GMEA All-State Chorus."

Covington is thankful for all of the support her program receives from high school and system administrators, and she appreciates the collaboration between herself, UCHS band director Will Stafford and new theater teacher Chris Adams in the Fine Arts Center.

One of Covington's highlights this school year has been the Disney Concert last fall, in which students dressed as Disney characters and invited children to attend in costume.

And of course, there was the Winter Concert.

"Several years ago, I had a group of graduating students who always said they wanted to come back and sing, so I told them my 15th year of teaching chorus I would have an alumni concert," said Covington. "After reaching out to as many alumni as I could, we had over 50 return, representing classes from 2002 to 2015, and sing our traditional concert closer, 'Carol of the Bells.'

"Former and current students filled the aisles and surrounded the auditorium, singing together in our amazing auditorium. My heart was blessed to see so many students return to a family they helped shape years ago."

As system-wide TOTY, Covington will move on to compete at a state-wide level, and the results of that competition will be announced in a couple of months.



Associate Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams and Superintendent Gary Steppe discuss agenda items with the board in the Feb. 16 meeting.

Collins...from Page 1

Little Rock, AR 72212

Dear Mr. Thomas,

I am writing to you in regards to the hundreds upon hundreds of complaints my Congressional office has received regarding virtually every aspect of Windstream's conduct in Northeast Georgia. While I firmly support free enterprise and believe the Federal Government's role should be limited, the nature and consistency of the reports I have received leave me no choice but to write to you directly. Since elected to Congress, I've tried to work closely with your staff, sharing with them the nature of the complaints and urging their swift resolution. But over the past three years, the voices of my constituents and the appalling reports of your company's behavior have only increased in volume and quantity. It's time for Windstream to take my concerns, and those of your Northeast Georgia customers, seriously.

Although Windstream is a private company, the telecommunications industry is both heavily regulated by the federal government and significantly dependent on federal grants and other forms of funding. Given these facts, Congressional oversight of your company's actions in Northeast Georgia is more than merited. And I believe, compelled. I have no doubt this letter will go unheeded, as the complaints of thousands of your customers have also gone unheeded. But I was sent to Washington, D.C. to represent the hard working families in Northeast Georgia, and I will continue to persist until we reach resolution.

As I'm sure you are aware, I've previously written to Chairman Wheeler with the Federal Communications Commission about Windstream's acceptance of Phase II Connect America Funds and your lack of demonstrated ability to meet the upcoming benchmarks. In addition to the concerns I expressed in that letter, and shared with your staff, there have arisen several other areas

of concern that I respectfully request you review and supply a response to me in a timely fashion. If you seek additional clarification to any of these questions, I encourage you to reach out to me directly, or my staff. I will, of course, be sharing this letter and your response to the thousands of frustrated and angry Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia.

1. I am concerned that your networks in Northeast Georgia are at over-capacity. Would you agree with this assessment? If not, please provide documentation demonstrating that Northeast Georgia networks specifically are not operating at over-capacity. If they are, please outline your plan to address this situation.

2. Please provide a detailed status update regarding Windstream's progress upgrading your copper networks to modern fiber in Northeast Georgia. Specifically, what percentage of the copper network has been replaced and what is the timeline for full replacement with modern fiber?

3. Of the fees that you currently collect from Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia, what percentage are being used to upgrade infrastructure in the same area as those subscribers reside?

4. In 2014, Windstream was granted by the Internal Revenue Service Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) status. Based on media reports at the time, Windstream's tax savings from this change in status was estimated to cut your company debt by \$3.2 billion and produce \$115 million annually in free cash flow. What is your estimated tax savings to date from REIT status, and what percentage of that estimated savings have you invested in broadband upgrades, both nationally and specifically in Georgia.

I appreciate your review of these questions and I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,
Doug Collins
Member of Congress

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