

## Kuykendall named Superintendent of the Year



(DeSoto Times-Tribune photo by Robert Lee Long) DeSoto County Superintendent of Education Milton Kuykendall is congratulated upon being named the 2010 Mississippi Superintendent of the Year by Anna P. Hurt, executive director of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators.

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HERNANDO — As a hushed crowd waited in silence, DeSoto County Superintendent of Education Milton Kuykendall bounded through a doorway and was greeted by a burst of applause at his selection as the 2010 Mississippi Superintendent of the Year.

Mississippi Association of School Administrators officials traveled from the Gulf Coast to present Kuykendall with the honor Monday.

Kuykendall made his way down a corridor in the district's central office building, and thinking a canceled school board meeting was back on schedule, was surprised by a phalanx of television crews and other media.

"I'm terribly shocked," Kuykendall said after his grandchildren rushed toward him and MASA officials approached him with a plaque in his honor. Kuykendall is also a former State Principal of the Year, having been awarded that honor as Horn Lake High School principal in 1995. Kuykendall, caught off guard, demurred by saying that the award should go instead to all the teachers in DeSoto County.

"The reason people move to DeSoto County is because they want great teachers to teach their kids," he said.

But, Anna P. Hurt, executive director of the Mississippi Association of School Administrators, said Kuykendall was well deserving of the honor of his own accord.

"I think it has to do with his vision and leadership," Hurt said. "It's his personal touch. It gives him the ability to get others to go out and do their best. It's a God-given talent."

Hurt said when Kuykendall became superintendent six years ago, the school system was overcrowded, the teacher turnover rate was 20 percent and two schools were Level 3 under the No Child Left Behind guidelines.

Additionally, more than half the schools were not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress under the former administration.

Hurt said Kuykendall turned the school district completely around.

"DeSoto County Schools now have the best facilities of any school system in Mississippi," Hurt said. "Mr. Kuykendall has put into motion bond issues that have built 10 schools and have five more underway."

Hurt said under Kuykendall's leadership, the teacher turnover rate has dropped to under 8 percent.

"Whenever I see Milton, he is always in the midst of a group," Hurt said. "He cheers them and encourages them and gives them the opportunity to grow."

Hurt said the honor bestowed upon Kuykendall is the third such honor for an educator in DeSoto County to receive from the state this year.

Hernando High School Principal Freddie Joseph was named the state's High School Principal of the Year and Dr. Janice Barton, the former principal at Oak Grove Central Elementary School, was named as the state's Elementary Principal of the Year.

"This is the first time that I've ever known it to happen when you have all the state's top leaders in education come from one school district," Hurt said. "DeSoto County stands alone."

Kuykendall was nominated by leaders in the DeSoto County community, including Jim Flanagan, president and CEO of the DeSoto County Economic Development Council and Tom Pittman, president of the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi.

"The quality of education represents the lifeblood of any community," Flanagan said. "One reason our school system is thriving is because of the leadership of our superintendent. Under his guidance, our school system has become the largest school system in the state with 31,228 students. In the last six years, he has led the effort to build and finance 15 new schools. Good schools and economic development are the perfect mix for an area to grow and prosper."

Pittman, in his nominating letter, said: "Milton Kuykendall has the unusual gift of not only seeing the big picture but also communicating it with a clarity that leads people to follow him to a better future," Pittman said. "He honed his ability as a three-time state champion basketball coach and then as the best principal in Mississippi. Now he uses it to make the state's largest school district also one of its finest."

Kuykendall said it's a "tough time to be a superintendent" with the district facing more than \$6.2 million in budget cuts and other challenges the school district faces.

Assistant Supt. of Education of Finance and Operations Ken Reid said Kuykendall has helped the district prosper even in difficult times.

"Mr. Kuykendall has done an outstanding job for DeSoto County," Reid said. "He's also a leader for the Mississippi Association of School Administrators."

Asst. Supt. of Education for Personnel Charlie Alexander said the honor is richly deserved.

"He's done an outstanding job," Alexander said. "The school district has grown so much during his time. He's passed two bond issues that have given us the facilities that we need. The academics are outstanding in this district."

Kuykendall is only the second superintendent of education in DeSoto County to receive the honor.

Albert Broadway was selected for recognition in 1990 as the state's top superintendent.

"Albert Broadway has always been a hero of mine," Kuykendall said. "He was someone who made instruction a main goal of his administration. I'm glad to be in the company of the Albert Broadways of this world."

Kuykendall will represent Mississippi on the national level for the nation's top superintendent in Washington, D.C. later this year.

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