

Teachers Up in Arms

Firing of Luke C. Moore Principal Just One Shot in a Wider War

BY KELLEY DUPUIS

The firing this summer of Luke C. Moore Academy's popular principal, Dr. Reginald Elliot, stirred up a hornet's nest of protest in Ward 5 but was only an especially high-profile case in what some teachers decry as an attempt to put experienced teachers out to pasture and replace them with cheaper, younger educators.

Luke C. Moore Academy, located at 1001 Monroe St. NE, is an alternative school aimed at young people who have attended

was held Sept. 23 outside the District of Columbia Public Schools office at 825 North Capitol St. NE.

"Teacher layoffs will not only increase class sizes for students but disrupt their learning and potentially make school environments unsafe," read a press release announcing the rally.

"This is about the privatization of public schools," said Nathan Saunders, a teacher and spokesman for the anti-Rhee forces. "There's



A placard-bearing student listens to speakers at a rally held Sept. 23 to protest teacher layoffs in DC public schools. Some teachers and teacher union representatives are accusing Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee and Mayor Adrian Fenty of trying to destroy the teacher's union. Photo: Kelley Dupuis

other schools previously without success. DC Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee reportedly found the school's attendance rates waning and felt the institution "lacked academic rigor" when she made the decision at the end of June to replace Elliot. The school's vice-principal, Gloria Tisdale, was also removed. Elliot's replacement, Azalia Hunt-Speight, took over Aug. 1.

Rhee has been taking a lot of heat from both teachers and parents not only over the firing of Elliot, but also what some see as a broader attack on the existing public education system in the city. A rally in support of teachers who have been removed and replaced

been a push to privatize health care and now there's a push to privatize public schools. This is about selling out our land to developers at bargain prices.

"She wants to get rid of us," he went on. "Thousands of people have been fired. She (Rhee) fires probationary teachers every year. If you show up late twice, you're labeled substandard. In two years, you're gone. New teachers will remain, and veteran teachers will go. It violates both contracts and municipal responsibility. Rhee and [Mayor Adrian] Fenty are busting the teachers' union."

Saunders spoke at the rally, as did a number of teachers and parents. A key complaint

among parents and educators is that older, experienced teachers are being replaced with younger, presumably cheaper ones, which in turn has led to accusations that Rhee is engaged in union-busting.

"Over 900 teachers were hired this summer," said spokesman Robert Brannum. "New teachers are good, because they can learn from the old ones."

An e-mail to Rhee's office inquiring specifically about the firing of Elliot at Luke C. Moore was answered only with a reply saying that the chancellor's office does not comment on personnel matters.

Candy Peterson, who blogs as The Washington Teacher, criticized the Washington Teacher's Union for being "passive," and she also criticized union president George Parker for his supposed failure to protect unionized members.

In a statement, Peterson

accused the teacher's union president of "twiddling his thumbs" while teachers have lost jobs.

"Fired teachers have lost homes, small retirements and poor health care [sic,]" Peterson's statement read.

She called upon the WTU to institute a citywide "work-to-rule" policy under which union members would work specific union contract hours and do only their jobs; pass a motion allowing teachers terminated or exceeded in the past two years to participate and vote as full union members, and to allow any union member with opposing points of view equal time and resources.

DCPS can be reached at 202-442-5885, or visit dcps.dc.gov for more information. Visit the Washington Teachers Union online at www.wtulocal6.org or call 202-293-8600 for more information. ★

A Park Celebrating Neighborhood Activism

BY AMANDA ABRAMS

Logan Circle residents finally found the perfect place for a memorial to their late neighbor, Connie Maffin, who died on Feb. 16 from a brain aneurysm. In a fitting tribute to



Mayor Fenty and Logan Circle representatives greet the crowd at the groundbreaking for the 10th Street Park. Photo: Amanda Abrams

Maffin's three and a half decades of community activism, she will be commemorated in a new park on 10th Street, a once-vacant lot whose upcoming development is directly due to residents' efforts to transform their neighborhood.

An overflowing crowd was on hand at 10:30 a.m. on Sept. 24, to witness the park's ground-breaking. Marveling at the large audience, Mayor Adrian Fenty described how the park will turn blight and vacancy into a multi-use area when it opens in spring 2010. Stacy Hannah, president of the Friends of 10th Street Park group, described the arduous year-plus process of turning the park into a reality.

But Maffin and her energetic efforts to improve her neighborhood – particularly as a pioneering member and officer of the Logan Circle Community Association (LCCA) – were never far from mind. Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans described a call he received shortly after he was first elected in 1991. “It was Connie, asking if I could get her sidewalk bricked up,” he said. “So that was my very first project – getting a sidewalk of Vermont Avenue bricked.”

Creating the park, a long rectangular lot between L and M streets, required a similar type of tenacity. Neighbors contacted their city representatives and sat through many meetings before the District government agreed to develop a park on the site. But by next spring, the spot should include benches and a small fountain, as well as a long walkway inscribed with quotes about community service. Memorial columns will commemorate Maffin's life and career.

Tim Christensen, an LCCA board member who worked closely with Maffin, explained that the LCCA had been searching for a place to memorialize her when they finally met with the Friends of 10th Street Park. “We were welcomed with open arms,” he said. “I think the group feels the memorial will be an enhancement.”

For more information on the Friends of 10th Street Park, visit www.10thstreetparkfriends.org. ★



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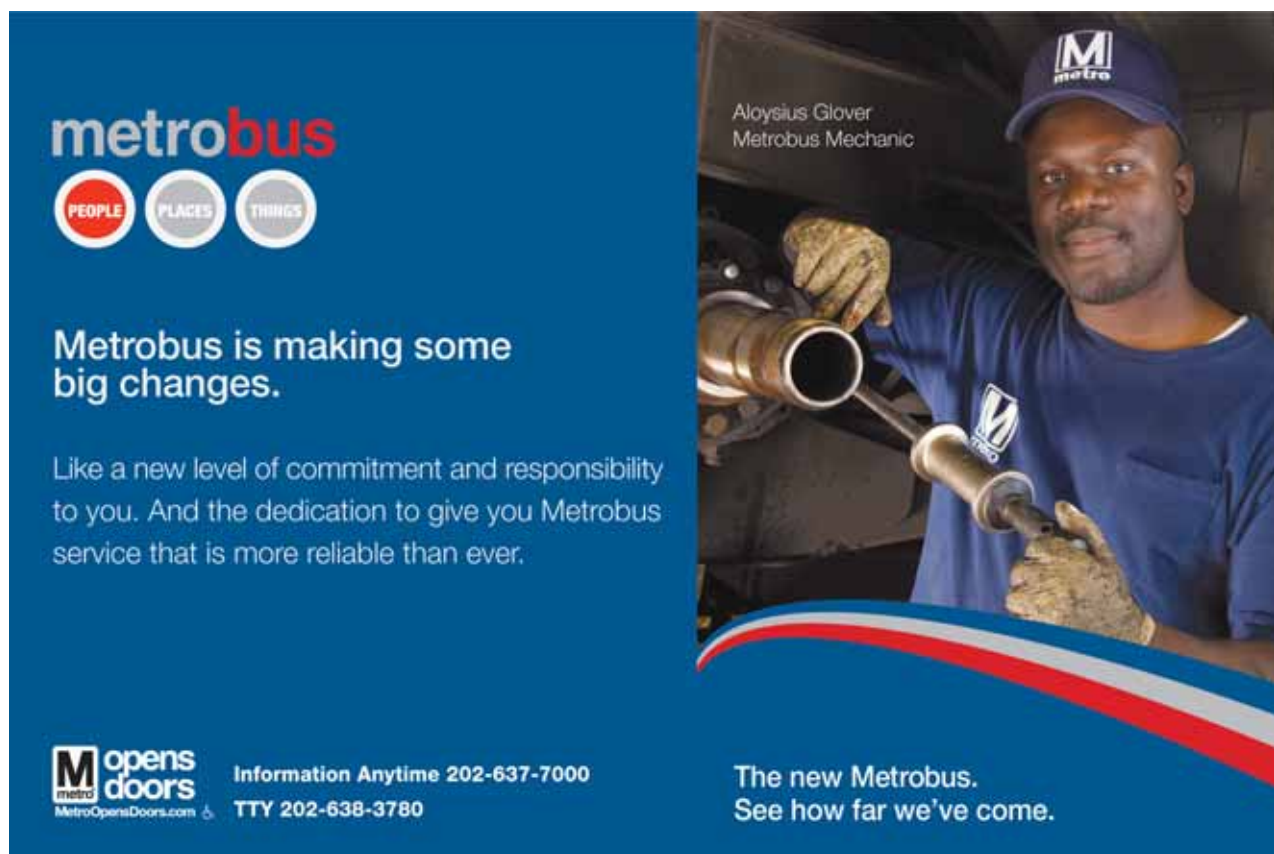
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