

An angel for many educators

Philadelphia's David Mallery was a mentor to a host of private-school teachers.

By William C. Kashatus

David Mallery was a local treasure, though only those in educational circles knew it. The Chestnut Hill resident, who died last week at 86, was too modest and too busy mentoring teachers to care about the spotlight.

As the longtime director of professional development for the National Association of Independent Schools, Mallery designed and conducted seminars for private-school teachers and administrators from throughout the United States and abroad. Teachers College at Columbia University gave him its Klingenstein Leadership Award in 1996.

Mallery was also a film historian and founding member of the American Film Institute. In the 1970s, he hosted a local weekly film-appreciation program, *The Movie Buff*, on what is now CBS3.

Mallery maintained an informal but powerful network that included Hollywood stars, cabinet members, and university presidents, but he preferred to be among teachers. And those teachers who knew him benefited greatly from his uncanny ability to entertain, comfort, and inspire us.

I met David in the mid-1980s, when I was teaching at a Friends school. He was impressed with my efforts to inspire students by "speaking truth to power." I was in my 20s, and he realized that eventually I would either adapt my idealism and passion to the realities of private schools or leave them altogether.

Independent education was changing. Schools were beginning to operate like businesses, competing for students, generating exposure to raise funds, increasing endowments, and finding ways to cut costs. Growth was being defined by the facilities built, the size of enrollments, and the diversity of offerings.

Instead of shaping the moral and intellectual fiber of students by making them and their families accountable to their mission and policies, private schools were becoming a kind of shopping mall for affluent families, in which the "customers" were always right. Administrators often buckled under market pressures, and teachers had to accept initiatives of little educational value.

For more than a decade, David helped me navigate the minefield. When I grew disillusioned

and insisted that teaching should be a "ministry," he noted that even "ministers have to pass the collection plate if they want to avoid bankruptcy." When the demands of school pulled me away from family, he gently reminded me that my wife and sons were "infinitely more important than anything the school asks you to do."

Finally, when I ended up at odds with administrators, David wisely suggested that my passion for education might be better served outside private schools, and I knew it was time to move on.

One of David's greatest strengths was his political savvy. Because of his association with the independent schools association, he had to remain on good terms with school administrators. But he also cared deeply about teachers, and was careful to exercise discretion when a career was at stake. I trusted him completely.

Although I left independent education in 1998, David and I remained close friends. And I discovered that he had mentored hundreds of other teachers, some with more difficult experiences than my own.

I also learned that David was right: I was a better educator as a writer, museum director, Little League coach, and community college professor.

David Mallery was much more than an advocate of teaching reform. He was a guardian angel who helped me see more clearly whom I wanted to be.

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