

A Bid to Keep the Spirit of Education—and Mary Baker—Alive

By Kimberly Dunbar

There are no Brockton public schools named after a woman, but Denise Baker-Bradley is hoping that will change. The city is building two new elementary schools and Baker-Bradley is campaigning for one of them to be named after her late mother and Cambridge College alumna Mary E. Baker.

Baker-Bradley started a letter writing campaign this spring to help rally support for this memorial to her mother. She is hoping that the stories and voices from Baker's colleagues and friends will solidify her mother's spot in Brockton history. "I don't want it to just come from me. I think my mom's legacy would be better talked about through the people that knew her," Baker-Bradley told *The Brockton Enterprise* in March.

The process has been both emotional and comforting for Baker-Bradley. "I knew she was a trailblazer, but I never really knew what an inspiration she was," she said, adding that she is learning so much about her mother from others.

Mary Baker was one of twelve children and the youngest girl in her family. Because she was a woman, Baker was denied her number one goal of becoming a nurse to help others. Instead, she became a legal secretary. "My mother believed that a person's opportunities in life increased when he or she broadened his or her lens with education," said Baker-Bradley. When Baker was 55 years old, she decided to discover the education she was once denied. Despite being the oldest person in her class during a time when adult education had not quite caught on, Baker received her Bachelor's from U-Mass and then her M.Ed. from Cambridge College in 1980. She passed away in 1995.

"My mother loved Cambridge College because she was able to use her past experiences to lead and guide her to her degree," said Baker-Bradley. "It made her feel invited and welcome."

Baker was a quiet and humble leader. She was the first African-American to work at Brockton City Hall and dedicated 14 years of her life to diversifying the Massasoit Community College campus as the Director for Community Outreach. She was also involved with Teen Challenge and with the Brockton branch of the NAACP. "Her life was simple, but she was very fulfilled by what she was doing," said Baker-Bradley of her mother. "She found her calling and was very committed to it."

Baker-Bradley said if one of the school's was named after her mother, Baker would probably have mixed emotions if she were still alive. "She'd probably say give it to someone else!" Baker-Bradley said. "She was very humble, but this would be very well deserved.

"Her legacy was in education," Baker-Bradley added. "She was a firm believer and huge advocate of education and its ability to open doors. She believed that education should

be a journey of learning about yourself and what you can give back to the world. If she had the opportunity to influence young minds with her name on an elementary school, it would be her greatest honor.”

The city has narrowed the nominees to three, and Baker is one of them. Baker-Bradley said that the process will continue throughout the summer. Hopefully, a decision will be made by late July or August.

If Brockton doesn't choose to name one of their new schools after Mary Baker, her memory will still be well served. Baker-Bradley is opening a small multicultural center in her mother's name in Brockton to keep her legacy alive in the community, a project Baker-Bradley started to help her deal with the loss of her mother. “My daughter is studying to be a nurse,” said Baker-Bradley. “This was her grandmother's dream and she want's to fulfill it for her.”

If you would like to join the campaign for Mary E. Baker, letters of support should be sent to Brockton City Hall, c/o Moises Rodrigues, 45 School St., Brockton MA 02301.