

## **Mary Mabry Benjamin**

### **2023 Hometown Hero**

### **Bio**

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Mary Mabry Benjamin was born September 6, 1946, in Dinwiddie County. She is the oldest of two children born to Sunnie P. Mabry and Barbara Branch Mabry. Ms. Mabry attended Mason Town Elementary, a Rosenwald School, and graduated from Southside High School in 1964. She attended Virginia State College (now University) and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Foods & Nutrition, in 1968. Thirty-five years later, Ms. Benjamin graduated from the University of Phoenix, with a Master's degree in Organizational Management.

Ms. Mabry worked in Food Services for Richmond Public Schools for one year. After marrying her late husband, Charles Benjamin, in 1969, the couple moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where Mrs. Benjamin worked for 35 years in Food Services for a public school system. She retired in 2005 and returned to Dinwiddie County in 2008.

Charles and Mary Benjamin had two children, Edwin and Traci. Edwin lives in North Carolina with his wife, Dr. Shanna Green Benjamin, and their two children, Chloe and Spencer; Traci resides in New Jersey.

Upon return to Dinwiddie County, Ms. Benjamin met Mrs. Doretha Moody (2017 Hometown Hero), who encouraged her to work on Barak Obama's first Presidential campaign. At the same time, she joined the Dinwiddie Democratic Committee where she met the late Ms. Ruby Evans (2018 Hometown Hero), who encouraged her to serve on the County's Electoral Board. Six months later, in 2015, Circuit Court Clerk Barrett Chappell encouraged Ms. Benjamin to run for the Dinwiddie County School Board.

Since that time, Mrs. Benjamin has served as both Chair and Vice-Chair of the School Board. She has served on the governing boards of Rowanty Technical Center, and the Appomattox Regional Governor's School. Currently, she serves on the governing boards of Maggie Walker and Code RVA. Most recently, Mrs. Benjamin was the Regional Vice Chairman and Chairman of the Virginia School Board Association (VSBA). She has participated actively in VSBA events each year of her service for the school board. Because of her commitment to education and others, Mrs. Benjamin was named the 2017 School Board member of the Year and the 2019 Advocate for Education for the Southside region.

Ms. Benjamin admitted that when she was first elected to the School Board, she was surprised by all that was expected of members. Barbara Pittman quickly became her mentor and gave her advice that has shaped her service on the Board. Ms. Pittman told her that it is important to show up at school events and anywhere there are students.

As part of her Hometown Heroes nomination, Dr. Kari Weston, Superintendent of Schools stated, "As a retired public-school employee, Mrs. Benjamin always puts students first. She is a champion of the school system and the entire Dinwiddie community. Mrs. Benjamin faithfully attends community activities and regularly communicates with our local and state delegates advocating for education."

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Mrs. Benjamin has served the following community and civic organizations:

- Board of Trustees at the Appomattox Regional Library System (Treasurer 2010-2018)
- Southside Area Democratic Women and Associates Club
- Member Little Bethel Baptist Church – Adult Sunday School Teacher
- 2nd Vice Chair of the Dinwiddie County Democratic Committee
- Vice President of the Dinwiddie County Virginia State University Alumni Association
- Vice President of the Southside High School Alumni Association
- Founding member of the Southern New Jersey Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women
  - Recognized as Woman of the Year – 2009
  - Phenomenal Member Award – Richmond Metropolitan Area Chapter – 2017
- Member of the Petersburg Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Former member of the Dinwiddie Electoral Board

Ms. Benjamin considers herself to be a resource to the community. People look to her for guidance and answers to questions. She does her best to educate the community on all that is available to them. Her goal is to encourage people, particularly African-American people, to step up and serve.

In her free time, Ms. Benjamin enjoys water aerobics at the Petersburg YMCA and loves to travel. She spends as much time as possible in North Carolina and New Jersey with family, and has plans to visit Aruba and Martha's Vineyard later this year.

It is an honor to recognize Ms. Mary Mabry Benjamin as one of Dinwiddie County's 2023 Hometown Heroes.