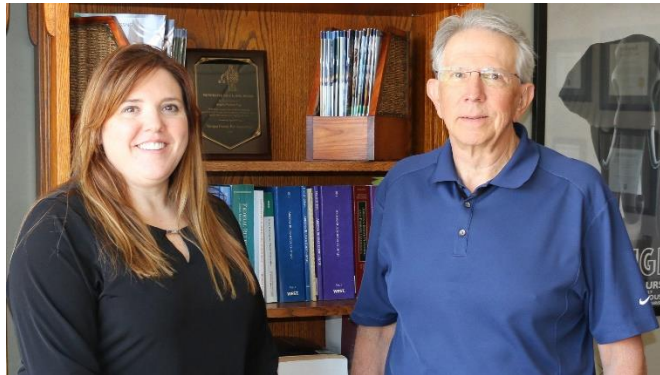


CLOSING THE GAP: CHUCK WALKER AND ANGELA WALKER-WEBER

On the first day at his new middle school in Southwest Missouri, Chuck Walker's teacher asked the class to write a paper. "We were supposed to discuss what we did over the summer," he recalls. As the adopted son of a Navy man, Chuck had already lived in Coco Solo, Panama, Cuba and, most recently, Washington, DC. "So, I wrote about spending the day at the



Smithsonian, seeing *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and the size of the Hope Diamond. After the teacher read my essay aloud, kids came up to me on the playground, saying, 'You're a liar. Those things aren't true.' My mother told me, 'A lot of these kids have never been out of the county. Let it go.'"

He did, and he didn't. A soft-spoken fellow, Chuck has always had an eye for the common good. "That's how we approach things. Every day, we say, 'Lord, what do you have for me?'" Chuck's path became that of an education advocate. As a scholarship creator, fundraiser and Yavapai College Foundation President, Chuck worked tirelessly to close the gap between people in his community and higher education — and it came back to affect his life in a most personal way.

"I've always appreciated what education does to develop us personally, and as a people." Chuck's own education led him to Bellevue University, where he graduated with honors, then to law school at Creighton University, and a 30-year career in banking. Married and a father of four, he came to Prescott in 1999. He is senior partner at the estate planning firm of Walker & Walker Attorneys at Law — a masthead he shares with his oldest daughter, Angela Walker-Weber.

"She's my succession plan," he says, "for when I get hit by a beer truck." Angela laughs at the idea: "You have to stop chasing that truck."

In Prescott, Chuck submitted his credentials to Yavapai College, hoping for an adjunct teaching position. Instead, YC Foundation Board President Ed Harris enlisted him in the \$69.5 million dollar 'Yes for Yavapai College' bond drive that financed much of today's Prescott campus. "We raised a bunch of money," Chuck acknowledges. He joined the Yavapai College Foundation Board in 2001 and, when he became its President in 2003, he confronted one of today's most serious obstacles to continuing education.

"Childcare was an issue I'd encountered before," he says. As a board member at the College of St. Mary in Omaha, he'd seen, firsthand, the value of assisting student parents. "They had a single mother's dorm," he says. "Administrators there were always surprised how much higher residents' grades were in the single

mother's dorm, and how students with good childcare exceeded expectations." Yavapai College had conducted a 1996 study advocating on-campus childcare, but its proposed child development center was an unfunded dream. "I made it my mission to complete it."

It was a hard sell. Money was not available from the bond drive, so a separate initiative began. The fundraising climate was frosty. Many people didn't connect childcare with student success: "How much more successful can a student be with reliable, quality day care?" Angela asks. "As a parent, you can focus fully on your education, knowing your child is safe, and developing, as well."

Slowly, with the board's perseverance and help from succeeding YCF President Oren Thompson, the proposed Family Enrichment Center (FEC) took shape. "The Del Webb Foundation heard about the plan and loved it," Chuck says. "We were just blessed with a director like Vickey La Motte, and a good administration."

The College broke ground on the Del E. Webb Family Enrichment Center in 2007, and its doors opened shortly thereafter. Since then, the FEC has established itself as a blessing — not only for children and parents, but the college and community, too. Today, it nurtures and educates 77 boys and girls, and has provided a safe, instructive environment for the children of more than 285 local families. As the only early childcare lab in Northern Arizona, the FEC also gives valuable, hands-on training to the next generation of teachers. The hard work of Chuck Walker and the Yavapai College Foundation Board, combined with the vision of recently-retired director, Vickey La Motte, have created a nationally-accredited jewel of early childcare, with a coveted five-star rating from First Things First of Arizona.

"It's the best," says Angela, a YC Foundation Board member since 2013. "The FEC's approach isn't just day care. Their goal is developing each child's cognitive, social and educational skills." Her enthusiasm is renewed every morning, she says, when she brings her six month-old daughter, Grace Elizabeth, to the FEC for a day of learning and adventure. "The quality of what she's getting — developmentally, socially and educationally — is exceptional."

Today, Chuck still remains active in Foundation activities and charitable pursuits. He and Angela each sit on several local boards. "We both know how to ask the right questions — 'How about this?' 'Why can't we do that?'" Angela says. "And both of us feel you should leave an organization better than you found it."

Though never boastful, Chuck is quietly pleased at the growth of the FEC, and grateful his service made an impact so close to home. "Single mothers were my first priority. Then faculty, staff and people in the community. I did it, never thinking that my own child would benefit."

■ *Michael Grady*

