



The Teacher Who Made a Difference

By: Aleia Williams

Have you ever felt as though you were totally exhilarated by a sport? Breathless, with your lungs on fire, every part of your body is traveling at maximum speed. Your mind is clear and your focus is totally directed upon crossing the finish line, striving and pushing to be number 1. If you have experienced track, then these feelings are familiar. Before I met Rebecca Skeen, our track coach at West View Middle School, the idea of running competitively had never crossed my mind. Now, thanks to Mrs. Skeen, running and her many other teachings are a valuable part of my daily life. She taught me as well as many other students to, first of all, prepare one's self mentally and physically for track; secondly, to stay the course; and, most importantly, to show good sportsmanship not only in track but in life.

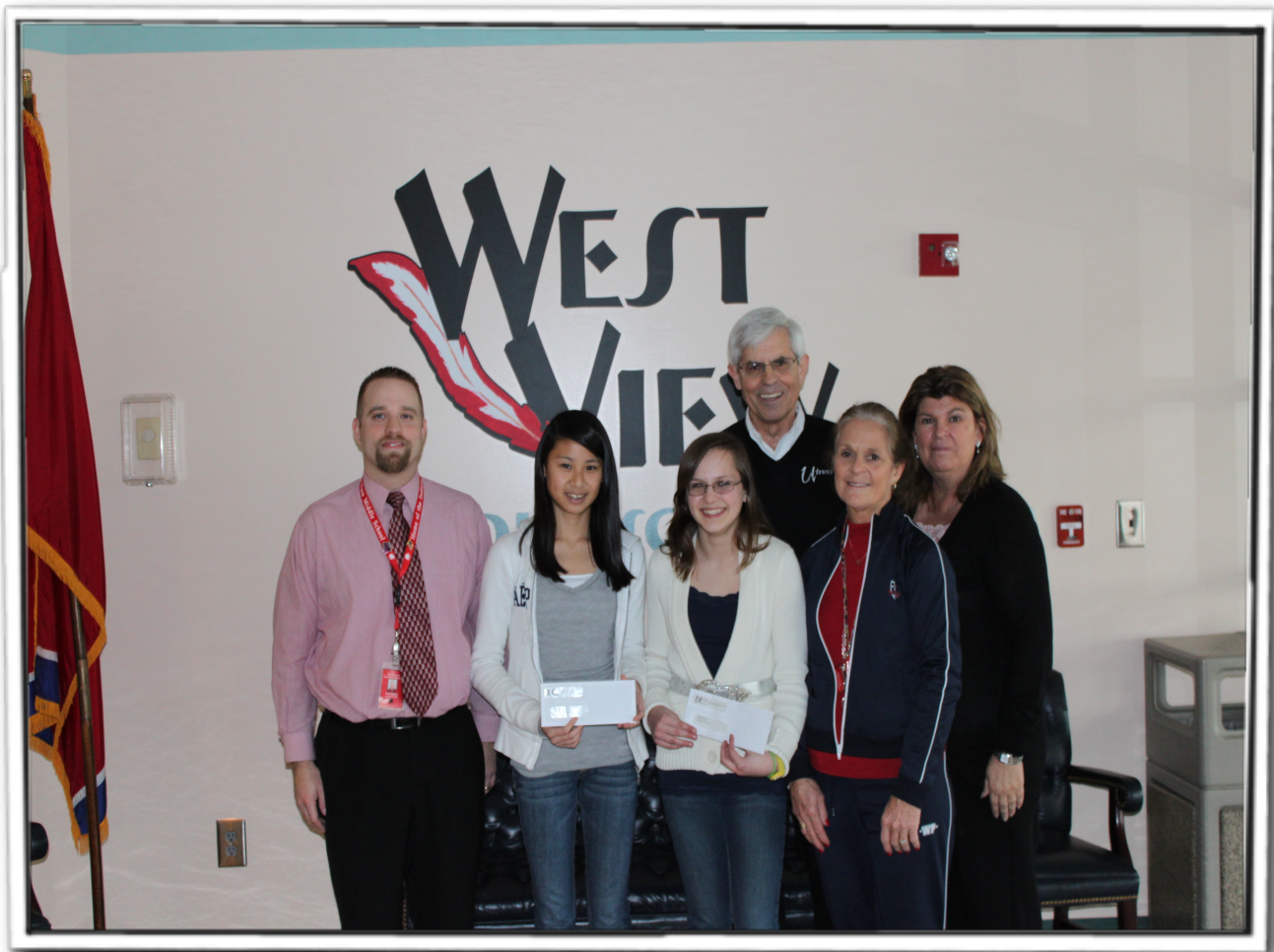
Many students today in the United States are neglecting their physical well being, with over half of middle school students being overweight. Mrs. Skeen taught students that one of the top priorities in life is physical fitness. She emphasized the values of good eating habits and the importance of daily exercise. But, it was more than her instruction in the classroom; it was her example that meant the most. She once told the class about how there had been a history of health problems with some members of her family, with one having died from a stroke. She stated this encouraged her to become physically fit. "Exercise," she stated, "is the key to improving circulation, increasing metabolism, and building upper respiratory strength." In modeling these skills in her daily life, she arose each morning and went for a run before coming to school.

Mrs. Skeen reminded students that preparing mentally was equally important with physically for track. To be good in track, she advised, demands intense focus, tuning out all of the distractions, and working toward a goal. Each day as part of her instruction, students engaged in practices designed to maximize skills. She stressed the importance of practice as being essential to improvement. And even though some students may have felt their skills "weren't good enough," she invited everyone in track to become the best one can be and to participate.

Not only did students learn the essentials on running, they also learned the value of "staying the course." Mrs. Skeen taught that whether one was in the lead or running dead last, there was no giving up. Quitters never finish a race or anything else. She always encouraged everyone to keep running and finish the race, then look back and be proud of one's own individual results. She counseled everyone to "compete with yourself as well as others." Always try to do better in the next race, learn from mistakes made and correct them.

Finally, the most important skill Mrs. Skeen taught was good sportsmanship. Running track is both an individual as well as team sport. Whether one person places first or last it impacts the entire team. Students learned that a team can take as much pride in carrying home a first place trophy as it can in seeing the last person, who struggles with running, cross the finish line. And how all students reacted to winning and losing was carefully monitored by Mrs. Skeen. No one was allowed to be disrespectful toward any other member of the team or other competitors. Students learned that showing grace in how one

accepts those prize winning moments or heartbreaking ones is the true test of good sportsmanship. Years from now when I'm older, someone may ask which teacher stands out in my memory as being of much importance. I will gladly say, "Mrs. Skeen.!" She has made a real difference in mine and other students' lives who she has taught.



West View Assistant Principal Scott Bolton, Competition winners Aleia Williams and Genevieve Gray, Utrust Administrator Dan Tollett, Coach Rebecca Skeen and English teacher Rolanda Ryans