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The Leadership Lessons
of Juanita M. Kreps

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Athletic & Non-Athletic Opportunities in Baseball

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ANNIVERSARY AT U.S. CAPITOL WITH
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WILLIAM SHOECRAFT AND DID YOU KNOW PUBLISHING INC.: BRINGING CULTURE INTO THE CLASSROOM

BY NATALIE DAVIS MILLER

“Necessity is the mother of invention.”
Jonathan Swift

It was out of necessity that publisher William Shoecraft, and twin sisters and educators Monica and Marla Marsh came together to meet a growing need in the sphere of diversity, inclusion and equity. The three devised a way to bring cultural competency to the masses, starting in the educational environment. But for Shoecraft, that wasn't his initial mission. In 1988, Shoecraft simply wanted to read stories about African Americans and their contributions to world history to his then 2-year-old daughter. But those books didn't exist. In 1989 he wrote a story about Rosa Parks for his daughter, and a year later family and friends encouraged him to publish it. Today his daughter is 24 and his son is 22. “I've always told them both, ‘You've got me involved in something that I had no inclination of doing in my entire life.’” That something would be Did You Know Publishing Inc., and Shoecraft is the founder and CEO. The company's tagline is “Promoting Literacy, Diversity, and Character;” with a mission to design and create culturally innovative educational materials with mass appeal.

Shoecraft had previously worked for Standard Register and was responsible for pricing of new products. He put his business sense to work, contracting a marketing research firm that substantiated what he already knew. “They found that there was a major need for materials on African-American history. There also was a need for Hispanic, Native American, and other cultures that weren't getting exposure to young children as well.” With backing from Procter & Gamble, Shoecraft moved forward. Not only did he use his business acumen, he also fell back on the knowledge he acquired as a volunteer in schools. He turned an old paradigm on its head — the one that says that teachers should treat students the same and not see color. He noticed that students weren't connected to lessons in the classroom because they didn't see themselves in the

lessons. “Now that paradigm is changing,” says Shoecraft. “If you don't see color — the student before you — you are missing those values, those strengths. We should see it as an opportunity to educate the student, using that person's culture to get them engaged in learning.”

As often is the case, the problem began to demand a solution, and multicultural education began pushing its way to the forefront. Shoecraft says that big publishers still weren't producing that kind of work because the demand wasn't quite high enough. Enter into the picture Monica and Marla Marsh, who brought to the table Woven Traditions, a program they had developed that would integrate multiple cultures into a lesson. “It was really a no-brainer,” says Shoecraft. “From a concept standpoint, I knew that there was a need.”

MONICA AND MARLA MARSH

Twins with shared interest and goals, Monica and Marla Marsh have worked in education for 27 years. Marla is currently the principal at Mayfield Elementary School, in Middletown, Ohio. Her sister Monica is currently the principal at D. Russel Lee Career Technology Center, Butler Technology Career Development Schools. Both received their bachelors of arts in education from Ohio State University, and their masters' in curriculum and supervision from Wright State University. When they met Shoecraft in the fall of 2002, they were both elementary principals at “sister schools” located directly across the street from one another.

“Monica purchased some instructional materials from William and suggested that I look into purchasing them for my building as well,” recounts Marla. Monica recalls meeting with Shoecraft in September of that year and she says she immediately saw the connection with his materials and how they would benefit her students. “From that point our relationship grew and I eventually did some consulting for him, revising some curriculum materials.” Eventually the twins would work on Woven Traditions, and contact Shoecraft

for his advice and assistance.

WOVEN TRADITIONS

Woven Traditions is a cultural competency curriculum aimed at making a measurable difference in the life of pre-kindergarten through postgraduate educators and their students. “Woven Traditions was born because, although there were people out there working in the field of equity, we could not find a comprehensive cultural proficiency curriculum to use. The information was out there, but it wasn't getting into the classroom which is where the ‘rubber meets the road,’” says Monica.

Currently the program is offered in partnership with Ashland University and the University of Dayton where participants can receive two hours of college credit. It will be a required course of study in the College of Agriculture Education at Ohio State University beginning in the fall of 2010. Additionally, it will be part of the Ohio Department of Education's School Improvement Grants through federal funding.

Dr. Robert Sommers, past president/CEO of Butler Tech, used Woven traditions as a training program for staff, and a set of curriculum materials with students to meet cultural competency standards. “The materials were thoughtful and effective. They dealt with a potentially delicate subject with forthrightness and care,” says Sommers. “Staff and students benefited from the program.”

Gwen Walton, professional development specialist with Mayerson Academy in Cincinnati, says she used Woven Traditions for a year in their Culturally Responsive Practices Expert Cadre. The training culminated in a train-the-trainer format for the Mayerson Academy Diversity Institute. “The Woven Traditions team assisted the cadre members in the preparation of their specific topics for the institute,” says Walton. “Being very knowledgeable and having lived the subject areas they present, the Woven Traditions team continues to serve as an excellent resource for helping educators learn how they view themselves,



WILLIAM D. SHOECRAFT, PRESIDENT & CEO OF DID YOU KNOW PUBLISHING, INC. WITH AUTHORS MONICA MARSH AND MARLA MARSH. WWW.DIDYOUKNOWPUBLISHING.COM PHOTO BY PAULETTE HARRIS

their students, and the world around them.”

Today Monica and Marla are joined by two additional educators, Rita Kolp, an elementary teacher, and Audley Smith, Ed.D, a guidance counselor. “Although Rita and Audley are not the original authors of the curriculum, their experiences as practitioners in the field has helped to expand the curriculum to what it has become today,” says Monica.

THE NEXT STEP

While Shoecraft will tell you that his company is a publishing company, he’s not looking for prime shelf-space in any of the mega bookstores. “As I talk to people in writing and publishing, I tell them that my focus is on the educational environment.” Shoecraft looks to his trainers/educational advisers and the “a-ha” moments he has witnessed in the classroom – those moments when a participant grasps how

his or her actions impact students. He’s not looking to change academic standards or create new content standards. He’s looking for ways to get young people moving in a better direction — and he’s working to make that happen through Woven Traditions. “It’s all about building new relationships with students and understanding what they want and what they need, and getting them motivated to learn,” says Shoecraft. **RID**