

Good afternoon Maconians.

I am running for the Macon County School Board as an almost lifelong Maconian.

I was born in Macon County, in Highlands, in August of 1962. My mom, Lynn Swerking deVile, came here from Dayton, Ohio. My dad, Ralph deVile, came here from Miami. My grandparents bought land in the Highlands area in the mid fifties and my dad, with a Harvard MBA, thought it was a really good idea to open up an Asian art gallery in Highlands.

And in 1960 he gambled the cost of a new family car, \$3,000, on what became the Stone Lantern, and it turned out okay. That business fed, clothed, and housed our family. My parents ran that shop together. The shop ran until my father passed away in 2017. And my sister Anne, and my brother-in-law, Jim, ran it until they closed the Stone Lantern on October 31st, 2019, right before the pandemic.

I was born in the old Highlands-Cashiers hospital on the hill up from the Highlands School. My sister Susie took over that abandoned property to first create the Highlands Literacy Council. I'm so very proud of her for that achievement. I'm proud of her legacy that lives on there as the Literacy Council is still going strong today. Susie also went on to start The Peggy Crosby Center in the old Highlands-Cashiers Hospital, which continues to serve as an umbrella facility for nonprofits in Highlands.

Our parents were supporting the public schools in Macon County before any of us were born. You can find that information in the local newspapers going back to 1960 and 1961. My mom was a public school teacher. She taught in Dayton, Ohio, she taught in San Francisco, She taught in Highlands School for over a decade.

I went to Carolina in 1980 and I got a philosophy degree. And I had this crazy idea that at some point I wanted to teach philosophy to high school students. And I've been lucky enough to have the support here in Macon County to do that. Carol Arnold, who just passed away, hired me in the fall of 1995 and then took a chance on me again in January of 1996 to teach social studies at Franklin High School. And I've been there ever since. I'm still there in the classroom, still teaching philosophy, still teaching American history, still teaching government.

Before I got into public education, I did have a life in the private sector. When I graduated from Western Carolina University in the fall of 1988, there were not many teacher openings. The pipeline was full in 1988, and certainly as a social studies teacher, you did not have your pick of schools or school districts. So, I went into the private sector and I worked for three major corporations. I worked for a Fortune 5000 corporation — Photo Corporation of America out of Matthews, NC. I was the youngest district manager in a coast to coast, publicly-traded company at age 27.

So, I know about managing money. I know about managing to maximize profit and minimize loss. I know about training people, how to sell, how to manage a store, how to take photographs, how to serve as a Human Resources Director. I ran 15 Glamour shot studios both in the Carolinas and Virginia. My first store in Charlotte was the top store on a per square foot basis out of over 300 stores in 1993. We did over a million dollars in gross annual sales in a store smaller than 700 square feet. I did the same gig for a year in Philadelphia, managing ten studios there, while also serving as an HR Director for a operation which photographed 1,400 weddings a year. I've sold rare books. I've sold used cars and new Daihatsus — you can go Google them.

I did all of that before I came to the classroom full time. In the summer of 1995, I decided I didn't want that career anymore and I came back home to Macon County with the hope of finding a teacher position.

My partner Lili is here. I encourage you to meet her. You'll notice three things about Lili. You'll notice that she is a little bit younger than I am. You will notice that she is a lot better looking, and you will notice that she's way smarter.

Lili is a cultural anthropologist from UNC Greensboro, and she teaches on the floor above me in the Careers Building at Franklin High School. She teaches food and nutrition, and she would dearly like for me to win this race so she can take over my role as a history teacher.

So, let me come to that point here. Hopefully you found my campaign card in your seat. If you didn't, I'll give you one later this afternoon. But you found in your seat my card, and it's got the web address johndeville.com. If you go there, you will find a paper that I wrote in 1996.

In the paper is the history of Macon County Education from 1920 to 1950. It's a 55 page paper. I read every single Franklin Press from 1920 to 1950. The papers are not indexed, so you just have to read every single paper on microfilm and take notes.

And let me ask you this. Take a guess. How many schools were in Macon County in 1925? How many?

I hear a guess of 16.

The answer is 59.

59.

So, when I found out that there were 59 schools and then we were down to 11, I wanted to know what was the story? How did we go from 59 to 11 in such a short period?

My paper focuses on what we won and what we lost. And we won a lot. We got a lot of goodies.

And we lost a tremendous amount when we lost our community schools. We lost connections, we lost community support, we lost continuity of a single child's educational progress from kindergarten thru twelfth grade. We created multiple and ever-widening cracks for our students, our children to fall through.

And so one of the reasons I'm running is I want to bring back some of that community. I want to get rid of this wall. I want to get rid of this barrier that exists between the Central Office and school board and everybody else who is a stakeholder.

We had strategic design meetings for the future of Macon County Schools in this county last week, and Lili and I went to three of them. We went to one in Highlands, one at Franklin for the community, and then I went to one for the teachers in the middle of the day, and they were rather poorly attended because I don't think they were all that well advertised. And I think there's a sense that even if you saw it in the paper, you happened to see it on Facebook, that, well, the question arises, "what can I do? And is my voice really going to be heard and be paid any meaningful attention?"

I want to cut through that skepticism as a school board member. I want to cut through that cynicism and I want to reach across every single group that exists in Macon County. There is no group of people that I will not sit down with and listen to. I will seek diverse perspectives out and not simply wait for them to come to me.

What my goal is is to pretend that a hurricane has just hit Macon County. Because from where I sit in my classroom the hurricane has hit North Carolina public education, Macon County Public Schools. The hurricane has hit public education. And we're in the Superdome after Katrina and the federal government and the state government, they ain't coming. We are on our own. At least for the moment.

I am certainly in favor of dispersing my energies throughout a wide range of activities. But I'm only going to take about 10% of my energy to focus on the General Assembly.

For the past 28 or 29 years, I've focused at least half of my energy on improving public education at the state level. But I've come to the realization that I should spend at least 90% of my energy focused on what we can do as a county.

I think we have to reach across every single divide and come together as if a hurricane had just hit to lift these schools and lift these kids back up. That's the only way we're going to recover.

I think we in Macon County and in Western North Carolina are gentrifying ourselves out of existence, destroying our culture, heritage, and traditions. I don't know what's going to be here in ten years. We're going to build a \$125 million dollar school but I don't know who's going to staff it. I don't know who is going to staff it if you look at how broken our pipeline is statewide. I

don't know who is going to staff when we see what is happening to the cost of housing here in Macon County and in all of Western North Carolina.

So, I think we're going to have to get really creative here in the next five years. The reason I finally, after standing on the sidelines, sitting on the sidelines for so long, I decided, okay, I have to get in.

I teach history. And, I do historical tours here in Franklin and I'm trying to get one going in Highlands. Last December, Lili and I were part of Gregg Clark's Ghosts of Christmas Past tours, and Lili chose to be Elizabeth Kelly, and I was Dr. Samuel Harley Lyle.

Elizabeth Kelly was not just a leader in public education in Macon County, an education leader in the State of North Carolina, but an education leader nationally. The first compulsory education law in the south comes from Franklin, North Carolina, from Dr. Samuel Harley Lyle in 1925 when he was serving in the North Carolina General Assembly.

Macon County had the highest per capita number of college graduates in the entire state. The history of this county is excellence in public education and I'm not just going to sit and just watch it collapse. And that is why I am moved to get off the sidelines.

I watched what both of my parents did for public education. My parents had me walking the sidewalks of Highlands in 1975 or 1976, with a pie sign on my small frame to support the bond referendum that built the Macon Middle School. That's my family's investment in public education. I've spent almost 29 years in the classroom and doing advocacy work at the state and local level and now I want to take that investment, that generational work to the office of Macon County School Board.

I need your help. I need your ideas. I need the conversations. I need the opportunities to listen to you. I need the opportunity to listen to as many different, diverse perspectives as possible to synthesize what is the most pragmatic vision going forward which enjoys the support of the greatest portion of our citizenry.

I need your yard to put a sign in. I need the back of your car to put a bumper sticker on. I need checks. I need checks because I think with a substantial media campaign and my existing reputation as a fighter for public education, I can win, we can win, and our children can win.

I sued the state of North Carolina and I won in 2015 when the state tried to take away the rights of teachers and demoralize veteran teachers right out of the classroom. I have fought superintendents and won extra staffing and reversals of destructive policies and wasteful spending. I have led teacher and parent coalitions to lobby the county commissioners for increases in the current operating expense budget to not add staff but to prevent devastating cuts to our schools.

I supported County Commissioner Gary Shields the past 18 months when some were trying to bury his public education advocacy, and some were trying to bury the idea of the new high school.

My history is public education advocacy, but I cannot win this alone. I'm looking at this campaign as an arc that does not stop on November 5th. That's just the first waypoint. That is the first waypoint in a five, ten, 15 year journey. Janet Greene sitting in the back here today, when she was a school board member and a county commissioner, made the statement that we can't just put the money into schools and build new consolidated schools and just walk away, because that's what we had done prior to Janet Greene's and Kevin Corbin's, and Harold Corbin's leadership.

And so we built the schools. And true to Janet Greene's cautionary warning, we walked away. We walked away. We didn't maintain it. We bought the brand new Chevy Silverado. And then we didn't do the oil changes and buy new vehicles as we needed them.

I'm still going to bust the state's chops to get them to do their part. If you go to Johndeville.com, you'll see if the Leandro decision was fully funded for Macon County, we would have another \$9 million a year from the state. And you go to johndeville.com, it will show you what that court-ordered funding would do for teachers, for nurses, for counselors, for schools, for our students.

I appreciate all of your support. I'll look forward to talking with you. I'll look forward to listening to you. I look forward to all of us pitching in and lifting Macon County schools back up to their historical place of excellence.

Thank you all very much.