

I am an American We are One Nation

‘RETIRED’ CEO TURNS TO EDUCATION

‘The most rewarding thing I’ve done’: Dick Munro, a youth teacher and mentor

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Each week, this series will introduce you to an exceptional American who unites, rather than divides, our communities. To read more about the American profiled here and more average Americans doing exceptional things, visit onenation.usatoday.com.

Dick Munro

Location: Naples, Florida **Age:** 86 **Profession:** Retired chairman and CEO of Time Inc.; education activist

Mission: Empower children to reach their full potential.

KATIE KLANN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS **Dick Munro didn’t have to look far from his home to find his passion. He works with Champions for Learning, which pairs kids with retirees to help them study and get jobs.**

NAPLES, Fla. - When asked about the three Purple Hearts he earned while serving in the Korean War, Dick Munro responds like he does to any question about his accomplishments: with absurd modesty.

“It doesn’t mean I’m a hero — it means I didn’t duck,” he laughed.

Munro, 86, is the former chairman and CEO of Time Warner Inc., which later became Time Warner, and a current education activist in Naples, Florida.

He began his career at Time Inc. as a trainee and retired 40 years later as top dog.

“I just went to work every day. It just happened,” he said.

After Munro “retired” from Time Inc., he took to sitting on corporate boards — 20 of them, he counts. They include prestigious companies, foundations and universities such as Genentech, IBM and Columbia. And that 25-year stint as director of the United Negro College Fund.

When Munro moved to Naples, a resort town known for its white-sand beaches and exclusive golf courses, he had no intention of relapsing into his philanthropic addictions. But then he peeked behind the luxury condos and five-star restaurants.

“I had no idea that just a stone’s throw away there were people hanging on by their fingernails,” Munro said.

Thirty miles northeast of Naples lies Immokalee, home to a community of Latino farm workers. Many live in trailers. Others cram into one-bedroom bungalows with their entire family.

“It was mind-boggling, seeing how these poor people lived. There’s an underbelly to this county that most people don’t know about,” he said.

Munro began teaching at a Head Start program at a low-income school and joined a college scholarship selection committee for underprivileged students. He took on two mentees from Immokalee and helped them with college applications. One, the son of tomato pickers, now interns at a cyber security firm.

Working with Immokalee children, he said, is “the most rewarding thing I’ve done. Their smiles will just melt you.”

Q&A WITH DICK MUNRO

What does it mean to you to be an American?

It means that I was fortunate to be born in a country the world envies. A country whose democratic principles have had an enormous positive impact on the world almost since its founding. We have set an example of civility, generosity, diplomacy and when required, power. With all that comes the responsibility of leadership. And we should cherish that responsibility. Yet, despite all of our enormous resources, we are becoming a nation divided, angry and lacking the civility we once knew. Issues of income inequality, racism and the treatment of immigrants are disturbing. But, I am an optimist. There will always be more good guys than bad guys.

What moment touched and motivated you to launch this effort?

My first exposure to poverty occurred years ago when I was involved with Save The Children. I visited Indian Reservations in the West, the Mississippi Delta and parts of Appalachia. It was an eye-opener, to say the least. I never realized parts of the USA were similar to third-world countries. Here in Naples, my first visit to Immokalee was equally shocking. This is a remarkable community of good, hard-working farm workers, many of whom live in severe poverty.

What gives you hope or what concerns you?

Public schools give me hope. The privilege to be exposed to students, teachers and administrators gives me hope. I wish more citizens could have the opportunity to visit classrooms to observe the learning process in action, to observe the professionalism and passion the great majority of teachers bring to their classrooms every day.

What do you hope to accomplish through your efforts?

There will never be enough volunteers. Naples is made up of extremely generous and civic minded people, but there is still a whole bunch of them who don’t become involved. This is unfortunate for both them and our community. Seniors have lots of skills to contribute. Many simply have not been exposed to the challenges we face. You really do get more out of volunteering than you put in.