

# WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

*A series of tributes to hometown heroes who have made a difference.*

## Cynthia Shepard Perry



**I**n 1954 Vigo County native Cynthia Norton Shepard charted a career course that reached fruition 32 years later when she was appointed U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Sierra Leone by President Ronald Reagan.

Born Nov. 11, 1928, in Burnett, George and Flossie Norton's daughter attended an all-black grade school before graduating in 1946 from Otter Creek High School, where she was chosen "Most Likely to Succeed." Cynthia promptly enrolled at Indiana State Teachers College but, after two children were born of her marriage to James Otto Shepard, she withdrew. At Cynthia's request, Herb Lamb, the principal at Otter Creek, helped map her destiny.

By 1968, while raising four children—Donna (Ross), James Jr., Milo and Mark—Shepard had earned a degree in English from Indiana State and received valuable work experience at Indiana State, Nichols Investment Co. and IBM.

The decision to attend graduate school in Massachusetts, which ultimately ended her marriage of 22 years, was extremely difficult. While working toward her doctorate in Amherst, Mass., she served as director of the National Teacher Corps at the University of Massachusetts School of Education. She was awarded an Ed.D. in International Education from the university in 1972. Meanwhile, she accepted a position as Associate Professor of Education and Associate Director of the Teacher Corps and Peace Corps at Texas Southern University in Houston. On March 20, 1971, she wed Wabash College alumnus Dr. James O. Perry, a professor at Texas Southern. Between 1974 and 1976, Dr. Shepard Perry, as she is known, was a Peace Corps trainer in Nairobi, Kenya, and U.S. Information Service consultant serving Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria and Zambia. Then she became a trainer with the United Nations Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Cynthia returned to Texas Southern in 1978 as professor of education and Director of International Student Affairs. She also fortified her ties to the Republican Party in Texas. As a result, in 1982 she was named Chief of Human Resources Development, U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington, D.C.

On April 11, 1986, Dr. Shepard Perry realized her lifetime ambition when she received a call from President Reagan, asking her to serve as ambassador to Sierra Leone. Sworn in on July 3, 1986, she was still residing in Freetown on Nov. 7, 1989, when President George H.W. Bush nominated her to succeed James D. Phillips as U.S. Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Burundi. She retained that post until retiring in 1993. She was named a distinguished alumnus by ISU and the University of Massachusetts in 1987 and 2002, respectively.

Returning to Houston in 1994, Dr. Shepard Perry became Director of International Investment Advisory Services for FCA Corp. and was appointed by Gov. George W. Bush to the board of regents of Texas Women's University. She also wrote a compelling autobiography, *All Things Being Equal*, in 1998. In July 2001, President Bush nominated Dr. Perry to serve as U.S. Director of the African Development Bank, a position she holds today.



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