

Larry Litwin
115 Kilburn Drive
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
856-424-5563
FAX---856-424-3738
e-mail: litwin@rowan.edu

June 4, 2001

MEMO

Enclosed are a number of items to help persuade your coverage of R.D. Wood School's special event:

- Media Alert
- *Seeds of Kindness* (see release)
- News Release
- Pictures to illustrate photo opportunities
- Biography of Mrs. Irene Bird
- Directions to R.D. Wood Elementary School and *The Neighborhood Park* (across from the Wood School, 700 Archer Street, Millville, N.J.)

DATE:	Thursday, June 14, 2001.
TIME:	9:30 a.m.



Seeds
Of
Kindness

Larry Litwin
115 Kilburn Drive
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
856-424-5563
FAX---856-424-3738
e-mail: litwin@rowan.edu

NEWS and PHOTO MEMO

EVENT: **SURPRISE** dedication and renaming of local park for long-time teacher, Irene Bird.

DATE:	Thursday, June 14, 2001.
TIME:	9:30 a.m.

PLACE: *The Neighborhood Park* across from R.D. Wood Elementary School, 700 Archer Street, Millville, N.J. (Intersection of Archer and Power—see directions, attached.)

Details: The City of Millville is surprising teacher, Irene Bird, by renaming a local park in her honor. Mrs. Bird is retiring after nearly 25 years as a third grade teacher at Wood School. She has spent thousands of hours transforming the unkempt lot into a neighborhood park. It now serves as a meeting place for children, teens and adults and serves as a site for concerts and holiday celebrations.

The park will become *The Bird's Nest—A Neighborhood Park*.

###

6/1/01

Larry Litwin
115 Kilburn Drive
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
856-424-5563
FAX---856-424-3738
e-mail: litwin@rowan.edu

Today's date: June 1, 2001

Release: June 14, 2001

RETIRING MILLVILLE TEACHER HONORED WITH LIVING LEGACY

(BIRD'S NEST)

Millville, N.J - - Dedicating a neighborhood park and naming it for long time Millville teacher, Irene Bird, should make her retirement a little easier.

Students and teachers at the R.D. Wood School have chosen the last day of classes (Thursday, June 14) to surprise Mrs. Bird. She has been teaching third grade at the school for the past 24 years.

The park across from the school is currently known as "The Neighborhood Park." It will become "The Bird's Nest—A Neighborhood Park."

Before Mrs. Bird's vision, the plot of ground was an unkempt, overgrown lot that had become a neighborhood eyesore. She pictured a park in its place.

"Her foresight and hard work, along with many others in the city, was instrumental in the design, development and success of what has become a meeting place for children, teens and adults," reflects Nina Crane, the school's technology coordinator.

The park is now an integral part of the school and community environment. Wood School holds assemblies and parent-teacher picnics there. At holiday time, carolers sing in the park and during the summer, concerts are scheduled.

Today, the park is brimming with flowering plants and shrubs. Residents living in the area believe that it has restored pride within their neighborhood.

(MORE)

(BIRD’S NEST/add 11111)

“The park has sparked interest among residents to take care of their own yards,” states Gladis McGraw, chair of the Third Ward Neighborhood Advisory.

In 1997, Bird’s work and dedication were recognized with the Very Special Citizen Award.

“The citizens and officials of Millville recognize Mrs. Bird’s many hours of volunteer time in initiating, beautifying and maintaining ‘The Neighborhood Park,’ ” stated Mayor James Quinn, presenter of the award.

Bird incorporates the park into her teaching. Her students pot seeds (marigolds, sunflowers and daisies, etc.) in the classroom. In the spring, they transplant them in the park. They also collect seeds from the park’s flowers in the fall and make “Seeds of Kindness” gift packets. The packets are distributed to Wood School visitors.

Bird reflects that the thought of converting the eyesore into a park came five years ago while visiting her grandchildren in Orlando, Fla. The children took her to a butterfly garden. She thought, “If it could be done in Florida why not in Millville?”

While Irene Bird deserves and gets most of the credit for her planning, hard work and dedication, she would be the first to share the credit with the city and the many volunteers.

What will Irene Bird do to fill her time once her retirement begins? “Continue my work in the park, of course,” she says.

###

Full page of Pictures to illustrate visual possibilities for both TV and newspapers.

Larry Litwin
115 Kilburn Drive
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
856-424-5563
FAX---856-424-3738
e-mail: litwin@rowan.edu

Today's date: June 1, 2001

Release: June 14, 2001

(IRENE BIRD BIO)

Survival, not education, was the aim for all those fleeing Europe in the 1940s. And so it was for Irene (Cibuliew) Bird. By the time she arrived in the United States in 1949, not only was she missing many years of schooling, she could not speak English.

Irene Cibuliew was born in Latvia in 1932 to Fyodor and Anna Cibuliew. When the war began in 1942, their life in Latvia ended. Bird and her family ran throughout Europe to escape the horrors inflicted by the Nazi regime.

In the spring of 1949, she arrived with her family at New York Harbor. They became tenants on a chicken farm working for room and board. Her parents cleaned the coops and vaccinated the chickens. She took a job working as a maid in a hotel until the fall.

Irene and her brother, Mike, learned English by reading comic books. "We couldn't understand the words but when you look at the pictures you can figure them out and you learn," she states.

Although she had missed many years of school, in the fall she entered Toms River (N.J.) High School as a junior. "I was 17 years old. I was not going to start as a freshman. So I told them I went up to ninth grade in Europe."

(MORE)

(IRENE BIRD BIO/add 11111)

"School was extremely difficult," states Bird. "I didn't know the language or the customs. I had never heard of Thanksgiving. I was green, literally off the boat. And everyone knew it. I was referred to as a 'DP' (displaced person). I had no friends. It was very hard."

She persevered and graduated in 1952, but just barely. "My goal was to become a nurse. I had to take a test to be admitted into the nursing program. I did so poorly that I was told I might be 'retarded'. I had to go back to school in order to score better on the test."

That same year she and her family moved to Millville, New Jersey. In 1953, she attended Millville High School to learn biology and algebra and to more fully understand the English language. Since she was a "post-grad," she had to pay for these courses.

She re-took the test the following year but failed again. Discouraged, Irene took a job as a clerk/cashier in a local retail shop. In 1955, she became a teller for Millville National Bank.

Many of her paychecks were used to buy necessities for her family. "Although my father worked at the cotton mill in town, we had very little money. We needed linens, pots and pans, dishes, everything. My brother was in the service and my sister, Gennette, was very young. It was up to me to help provide. I didn't mind," she remembers.

(MORE)

(IRENE BIRD BIO/add 22222)

In 1957, she met her future husband, William R. Bird, whose family owned a local business. Two years later, they were married.

In the years to come, Bird gave birth to three children--William Jr. (Bill), Elizabeth (Lisa) and Ellen. In 1967, when the youngest of her children was just three years old, she enrolled in her first college course at Glassboro State College (now Rowan University).

"A friend asked me if I was interested in taking a course with her. We started taking extension courses through Glassboro. I took one course at Bridgeton (N.J.) High School, one at Vineland (N.J.) High School and even one at Leesburg State Prison (now Bayside State Prison).

"I didn't start out with the intention of becoming a teacher. One thing just lead to another," she says.

"She never missed a beat while we were growing up and she was in school," recalls Bird's daughter, Lisa (Keller) of Glassboro. "She cooked dinner every night, kept up the laundry and the housework and still did well in school. She was very determined."

Today, Irene Bird teaches English and many other subjects. In 1977, she began her teaching career as a third-grade teacher at R.D. Wood School in Millville. This year marks 25 years at Wood and will be her final year.

She has been an integral part of improving the third grade curriculum at Wood. Her approach has been a well-rounded one, which involves the community and local environment.

(MORE)

(IRENE BIRD BIO/add 33333)

She felt that Wood School's relative proximity to the ocean was an advantage that had to be utilized. She began to teach her students about the importance of wetlands as an ecosystem. Her annual class trip to Corson's Inlet provided first hand experience for the students, many who had never seen the ocean.

Another class trip is an outing on the A.J. Meerwald, a historic, restored schooner ship. Bird and her students sail with the boat's crew on the Delaware Bay.

While visiting a park with her grandchildren one day, she saw a butterfly garden. She was struck with the idea of converting an empty, run-down lot across from her school into such a garden. After much planning and hard work with the city and many volunteers, her vision has become a reality. The lot is now a beautiful garden/park. She maintains the flowers and shrubs in the park.

Naturally, she incorporates the park into her teaching. Her students pot seeds (marigolds, sunflowers and daisies) in the classroom. In the spring they transplant them in the park. They also collect seeds from existing plants in the fall and give seed packets as gifts.

(MORE)

(IRENE BIRD BIO/add 44444)

The park has become a major part of the school and community environment. The school holds assemblies and parent-teacher picnics in the park. At holiday time, carolers sing in the park and during the summer, concerts are held there.

Bird's tenure at Wood School has been fruitful for the school and the community, but most importantly, for the students. Amanda Campbell, an 8 year-old student, sums it up best. "Mrs. Bird can be strict sometimes, but when we do what we are supposed to do, she is nice. We learn a lot."

Bird's three children are Bill, an attorney in Orlando, Fla.; Lisa, a teacher in Pitman and Ellen Sager, a registered nurse, lives in Vineland. She has six grandchildren.

###

Larry Litwin
115 Kilburn Drive
Cherry Hill NJ 08003
856-424-5563
FAX---856-424-3738
e-mail: litwin@rowan.edu

Directions to R.D. Wood School from the Philadelphia area:

- Travel south on Route 55 to Exit 27, towards Vineland/Millville.
- Follow Route 47 south until you reach the second traffic light. Route 47 forks at this light.
- Stay right at the fork. This is High Street.
- Follow High Street to Powell Street.
- Turn right onto Powell Street. (There is no left to Powell Street.)
- Follow Powell Street to R.D. Wood School; about two blocks.