

Leaders Among Us

Southern Illinoisans who have a positive impact on their communities



Southern Business Journal
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 MAY 2012

ELIZABETH LEWIN

Elizabeth Lewin has always been prepared. Prepared for hard work. Prepared to weigh all opportunities when they present themselves. Being prepared has served Lewin, 63, very well. Perhaps, that is because she herself was prepared that way.

The oldest of four girls, Lewin spent time working beside her maternal grandfather on his farm outside of Marion; but, as often as possible, she could be found in the shadow of her

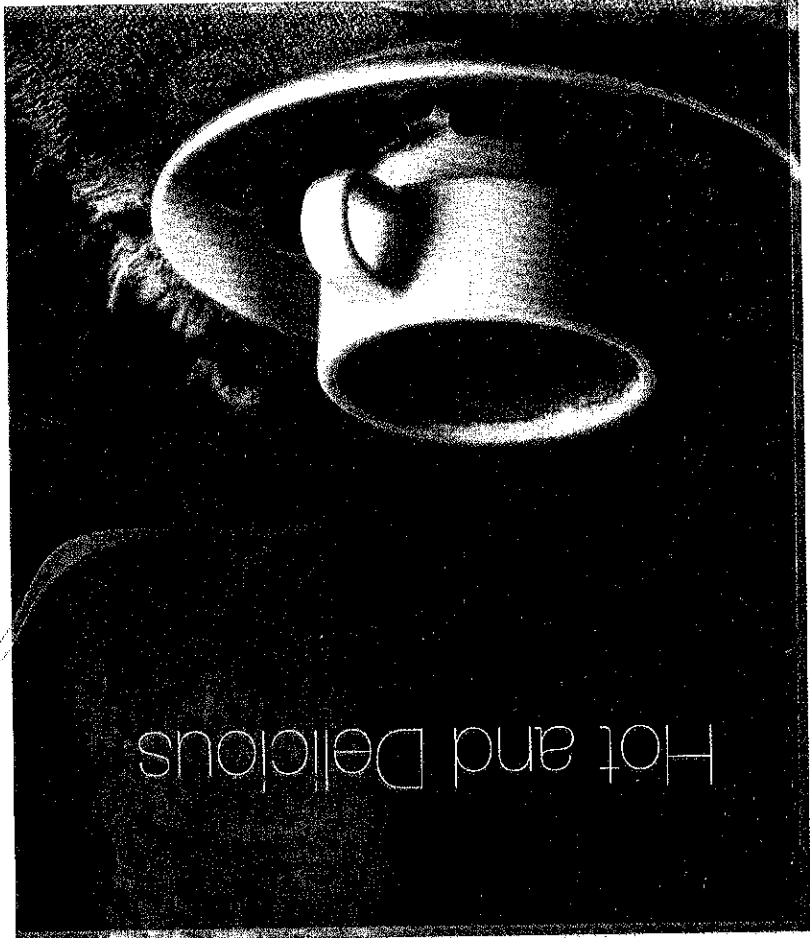
father, the Rev. Archibald Mosley, who lived in Carbondale, but served as a schoolteacher and principal in Sandusky. He also was pastor of Bethel AME

Church in Carbondale. "He was away during the week, and on the weekends he was busy with the church," Lewin remembers. "When we were together, I was assisting him, helping clean the church and preparing things. My time with him was working." On the farm, she learned the virtue of hard work. From her father, she learned things like how to manage business affairs, how to deal with people and how to communicate effectively. She learned, too, through school, attending both Attucks and university schools in Carbondale and earning three degrees from SIU Carbondale, as well as a doctorate from the University of Sarasota. It was with family, however, where she says she really got an education. "The things that I learned as a child have served me to this day,"

she says. "I have four degrees, but what I learned from my parents and my family far overshadows the content that I got sitting in courses." Her parents also taught her to explore options and to be prepared for whatever might come her way. As a young woman, she considered careers in medicine and law, but she pursued communications. "As an undergraduate, I had a radio show that I loved," she recalls. "It was called 'Voices of Black America,' and I interviewed many of the speakers who were coming to the university. I thought about looking for a career in radio or television. My parents supported me, but told me to take courses in education — just in case, because you never know." Lewin says that after graduation, jobs in broadcasting



Steve Janke



Hot and Delicious

DID YOU KNOW?

Elizabeth Lewin loves tinkering with machinery and equipment, including her lawn mower. "I love fixing things," she says. "I think my domestic side isn't in the house; it's outside."

"I was offered a teaching job, though," she says, "and the rest is history." That job was teaching in East St. Louis, a position she would hold for six years. "My time in East St. Louis was interesting," she adds. "This was the 1970s, and that job prepared me for everything that followed." After a stint teaching part time at SIU Edwardsville and St. Louis Community College, Lewin returned to the high school ranks, serving as assistant principal and principal at Edwardsville High School, becoming the first African-American in school administration in the community. Even in this role, she was being prepared for her next job: superintendent of Carbondale Elementary School District No. 95, a position in which she served for 10 years, beginning in 1995. "One of the reasons I was chosen to be Carbondale's superintendent was my previous

experience," she says. "In Edwardsville, I had the opportunity to assist my then-superintendent in running two referendums to build a new school building." It was in Edwardsville that Lewin also followed her father's example by becoming involved in the community. She volunteered at a rape crisis facility and served on the city council.

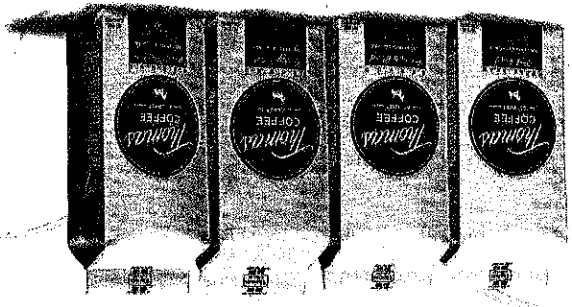
Today, Lewin is an assistant clinical professor in the College of Education and Human Services at SIU Carbondale, where she prepares those who want to enter educational administration. She calls it "opening students' eyes;" "The students get a very different perspective when they

have me in the classroom," she explains. "I'm the only one in the department who has been a superintendent. I tell them that even though we must keep students front and center, as a superintendent you also have to protect the district as a whole, be concerned about the image of your community, as well as get community input. It's a much bigger job than only being concerned with the classroom." She also serves as an appointee of the Illinois State Board of Education, assigned with overseeing the use of state funding in the Cairo schools, once again using skills she learned not only from her years as an administrator, but also the leadership lessons she learned from her father. In fact, she uses those skills as treasurer of four organizations, including Bethel AME Church — the very church her father served as pastor. She has also served as president of the board for Southern Illinois Regional Social Services and was part of the negotiating team in the agency's merger with The H Group. She

calls the process a learning experience. "I'm always amazed, with all I have learned over the years, that I still learn. I think that's why I enjoy doing things," she says. "I am able to use the skills I have, but add to those skills, as well." She adds that she doesn't regret any of the paths she has taken in life. "I always have walked through life doing what I was taught to do, doing what I believed I have been instructed by my earthly and heavenly fathers to do, and doors opened for me," she says. "People would say, 'We need this done or we need this done,' and I was prepared to do it." Lewin says she has never forgotten the lessons she learned as a child, and it was those same lessons she passed on to her own daughters. "I know they're both able to take care of themselves, as well as their parents and grandparents if we ever need it." In other words, she has taught them exactly what she learned as a child: It is good to be prepared.

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