

## ***Meet the September 22, 2018 WaterFire Orb Lighter:***

# **Dr. Martha Bruce**

A life full of adventure, travel and challenge. A soul full of compassion, intelligence, giving and love. A heart for education, children, inmates and literacy. An eye for beauty and the arts. This is only the beginning introduction to a very special woman in our community, Dr. Martha Bruce.

Dr. Bruce grew up in Farrell, Pa at a time when polio was prevalent. After her older sister had contracted the disease, it was a short time before the then 15 year old Martha Bruce showed symptoms that led to her diagnosis – polio. She credits family members who cared for her, a grandmother who raised her, and Shriners Hospital for treating her. Dr. Bruce spent nearly 1 year at the Shriners Hospital in Erie, PA where she formed many bonds and received excellent care. Although a potentially deadly disease, Dr. Bruce went back to school determined to finish her education. Finishing high school was only the beginning of what this wonder woman did next.

After receiving her diploma, Martha Bruce received a Bachelor's degree from Youngstown College in a short three years. From there she started teaching at Thorn Hill School in Youngstown. She then pursued a Master's Degree in Administration and Supervision from Westminster College. That degree opened the doors into administrative positions in Youngstown schools. While at Westminster she studied under Dr. Clara Cockerille. Martha credits this professor as the "most brilliant woman I had ever known. She was severely handicapped. Her walking was very labored and difficult. She knew people in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh so she suggested that I apply there. Thanks to Dr. Cockerille, "When I arrived in the Reading department, they already knew who I was." It was there that she became Dr. Martha Bruce, receiving a Doctorate in Language and Communication Skills from that University. Receiving that PhD turned her life story into one of decades of travel, world wide travel, and a pursuit of teaching literacy, and the love of reading everywhere she went.

Dr. Bruce's first travels were to Africa – a place she had always wanted to visit since studying it in geography class as a child. The thoughts of mud houses, grass roofs, all of the descriptions left her curious to learn more about this country. This trip was only the beginning of her thirst for adventure. Upon returning to the United States, Dr. Bruce wrote to the Nigerian Embassy asking for a position there. It wasn't long before she was contacted and offered a position to teach College at Alvan Ikoku in Nigeria. She quickly accepted. Her position was to teach reading and methods of teaching English, to those interested in higher teaching levels. While there she began an outreach program to the local children.

This outreach program was a "Story Hour" that Dr. Bruce opened her home for, on Saturdays. She did this in response to the children's hunger for education. This open Story Hour began with 8 children, for one hour, and quickly grew to 135 for over three hours. Her home was a center to nurture children's love of reading and learning. It's no surprise she quickly became known as "Auntie Martha".

Dr. Bruce's travels took her to sessions of the World Congresses on Reading in Australia, Sweden, Hawaii, Argentina, the Czech Republic, Jamaica, New Zealand, Scotland, the Philippines, Germany, Nigeria, England and Hong Kong. She has published and presented 17 professional papers, and has been a guest lecturer at several universities. Her love for children and literacy also led her to author several children's books.

Locally, Dr. Bruce remains very active as a volunteer in many organizations. She is active in the Sharon Beautification Committee, Shenango Valley Gardeners, still reads to area youngsters, and has been a faithful volunteer at WaterFire since our beginning. Her personal motto "Do as much good as you can, for as long as you can, for as many people as you can" is evident by the way she has and continues to live her life! Dr. Bruce, there aren't enough words to tell you how special you are to all of us, how amazed we are by the life you've lived and all the lives you've touched, and how lucky we are to have you in our community! THANK YOU for making this town your home!

Due to restricted arm movement as a result of post-polio syndrome, Dr. Bruce will be assisted in the lighting ceremony by Audrey Thurston, United States Air Force, Retired.

***WaterFire is Honored to have Dr. Martha Bruce light the Orb tonight!***

