

From her time as student and continuing throughout her life, Gloria Merry Walker has exemplified the “Murphy way.” What defines the Murphy way? It the proud, strong, and long-standing tradition of excellence not only in academics, but also in leadership through service to others. While Murphy has equipped countless thousands for success, true Murphy Panthers know that real success lies not in what we have, but in who we are. Gloria has used her knowledge, talents, resources, and genuine heart for others and left a lasting, positive impact for good. This is who she is.

As a student, Gloria was active in a variety of clubs and organizations at Murphy. She participated in the Bible club, FTA, swim team, and Latin club. She also worked on the Welfare Store. Her honors and distinctions included being voted Miss Friendship during her sophomore year and serving as head cheerleader and historian of the National Honor Society during her junior and senior years. Gloria was named favorite editor of the *Mohian* as senior at Murphy during which time she also represented the school and the City of Mobile as an Azalea Trail Maid, traveling to Chicago to promote tourism in the Port City.

In 1962, Gloria graduated with her bachelor’s degree in political science, with a minor in economics, from Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia. She worked for Jack Friend Market Research Company and Tucker Wayne Advertising Company following graduation and in 1965 she married William E. “Bill” Walker, with whom she would go on to raise three children and make their home in Columbia, MS, and later Jackson, MS, where she currently resides. After marriage, Gloria began a commitment to serving her community that has spanned decades. She has served in many capacities as board member and volunteer with civic organizations including Goodwill Industries, Big Brother Big Sister, Mississippi Children’s Home Society, Junior League, and the Mississippi Center for Public Policy just to name a few.

Gloria’s crowning contribution to her community and exemplification of the Murphy way can be seen through her steady leadership at The Walker Foundation. In 1979, Bill Walker sold his family’s chain of dollar stores and used ten percent of the profits to endow a philanthropy—The Walker Foundation—now worth approximately \$10 million. Following her husband’s death in 1993, Gloria took the helm of The Walker Foundation and as chairman helped steer it on a course that would see over \$17 million in grants given in her 25-year tenure there. She carried on the legacy of her husband Bill, his strong belief in Christian stewardship and a desire to help the underprivileged, growing a foundation that is a powerful force for good in Mississippi today. The Walker Foundation’s initiatives have focused on two primary areas: improving quality of life and access to opportunity, especially for under privileged children. Through a variety of community programs and partnerships, these initiatives have included the building of near 200 Habitat for Humanity homes, supporting and growing local start-up businesses, providing job-readiness and placement services, after-school care and child enrichment services, and most recently the opening of the Midtown Public Charter School. The school focuses on developing entrepreneurial and critical thinking skills in students from low-income families to help them become citizens equipped to succeed in a global 21st century.

Gloria Merry Walker has dedicated a lifetime to leadership through service to others, showing us the Murphy way, and making Murphy High School proud to consider her among its most distinguished alums.