



DEFINING MOMENTS

Why Kathy Cox gave away \$1 million—and keeps on giving

Should she take the \$500,000 or take a chance at becoming the first U.S. contestant to win Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader's \$1 million grand prize? Should she keep the job she loves—teaching government—or accept her students' challenge to put her lessons into action? Kiwanian and Georgia State School Superintendent Kathy Cox talks to Kiwanis International CEO Rob Parker about critical decisions, winning and leadership.

Rob Parker: I understand you're smarter than a fifth-grader and that you won \$1 million?

Kathy Cox: Yes, so far I'm the only person in the United States who can say that. The one real defining moment of the show was when I had to make the decision to stop at \$500,000 or go for the million. I felt like if I had stopped, it would be like saying I'm dropping out of school, and I couldn't do that. As state school superintendent, I encourage the students of Georgia to go for it and not drop out, so I went for it and I won \$1 million.

RP I understand that you have special plans for that money.

KC Yes, we made a decision that we wanted to donate all of the earnings to support education here in Georgia. Although we are still working out the details, our hope is that the money will go directly from the producers of the show into a trust fund to support two schools for the deaf and one for students who are blind.

RP That's awesome. Now, Kathy, I know you are a dedicated Kiwanis member. Why did you join Kiwanis?

KC I learned about Kiwanis and Key Club as a teacher and was impressed with the work they did with young people. Our Kiwanis club in Peachtree City is very visible, sponsoring a well-known airplane show, and they do so much good for the community. The Kiwanis members were just relentless about asking me to join, and eventually I said yes. And I have not regretted it for a moment.

RP I know a lot of your work is with volunteer leaders. How do you approach leadership with people who don't report to you?

KC The biggest part of my job is to inspire people I don't have any control over.

RP I'm familiar with that concept (laughing).

KC When you don't have direct control over how people spend their time every day, then vision casting becomes very

important. People need to be inspired to believe in themselves and what we can achieve working together. So my job is really one of having that big vision for Georgia education, setting those sights really high and then encouraging and empowering people to get there.

RP You've had to make changes.

KC That's probably going to be the hallmark of my two terms as superintendent: that people will say a lot changed in eight years. And that's a good thing. But change can be very difficult. Often people want to stop when things start to get too hard, which is when leaders need to be tenacious in their pursuit of the right kind of change. Change is a constant in our society and in our organizations. Kiwanis has to change to remain relevant, and I'm encouraged about the things I'm seeing and hearing.

RP What would you say to Kiwanis leaders who're working to make our organization relevant and flexible?

KC One thing I admire about Kiwanians is that they never stop learning. They keep growing as individuals and are always willing to try new things. Kiwanis members know the work isn't done. The work Kiwanis does with children internationally is so important, as well as the work they do in their own communities. Many young people don't have an adult in their life they can look up to. I just want to encourage Kiwanians to stay vigilant about the work they do with Key Club and mentoring our young people in the schools. This will make such a huge difference as these young men and women become parents and leaders who will follow in our footsteps.