



STAR LEADERSHIP AWARD

Daniel to lead choice of Leadership awards

By **LAURA MCFARLAND**
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The impression Mary Costello Daniel gained when interviewing 20 of the area's highest achieving high school seniors is not only that they want to change the world, but that they already are doing so.

"They are not waiting for a col-

lege degree, they are not waiting to start their careers, they are not waiting until they have the right friends or the right money and they are not even waiting for somebody to tell them it is possible," Daniel said about the students vying for the 2012 Star Leadership Award. "They are just going out and changing the world before they have even gotten old enough to vote."

This is Daniel's second consecutive year serving on the Star Leadership Award Committee. This year, she is the chairman of the seven-member group that chooses a winner from each of the area's five public high schools for a \$10,000 cash prize presented by The Winchester Star.

A lawyer, Daniel, 44, of Berryville opened her own firm, The Daniel Group, in 1998 in

Winchester. She focuses on creditor's rights and judgment executions.

Raised on a farm in Frederick County along with her brother and three sisters, Daniel graduated in 1986 from James Wood High School.

She and her husband, Bill, an assistant principal at James Wood

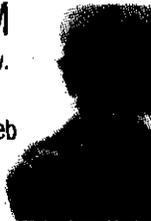
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Mary Costello Daniel

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72
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Full report A6

55
LOW



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Leadership

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High School, have a 4-year-old daughter, Bray Frances Daniel, and two dogs, an ancient Airedale terrier named Haggis and a Welsh terrier named Cardiff.

A lot of attention is focused on teenagers who are criminals and slackers, but they make up a small group, Daniel said. She is thrilled to be part of a committee that can spotlight the group of students on the opposite end of the spectrum — teenagers who constantly strive for excellence and to make a difference in their community.

"The students themselves are remarkable," she said. "Every one of them was beyond description in how extraordinary they are in their accomplishments, their poise and their maturity."

The Winchester Star began recognizing student leaders at area high schools more than 50 years ago.

This is the 59th time the newspaper will present the Star Leadership Award to graduates of Clarke County, Handley and James Wood high schools; the 19th time at Sherando High School, and the ninth time at Millbrook High School.

The Star Leadership Awards will be presented at graduation ceremonies for Handley High School (June 5), James Wood High School (June 9), Sherando High School (June 8) and Millbrook High School (June 6). Clarke County High School's award will be presented at its Senior Recognition ceremony (June 3).

Former Sen. Harry F. Byrd Jr. established the Star Leadership Awards in 1954 while he was editor and publisher of The Star.

An award winner is a student "who best exemplifies a combination of excellence of character, qualities of leadership, and devotion to duty."

Publisher Thomas T. Byrd selects a committee that chooses the award recipients. The committee members live in the newspaper's coverage area of Winchester and Frederick and Clarke counties.

This year's committee is, in addition to Daniel, Patricia Taylor, Cary C. Brubaker, Fran Jeffries, Anthony Roper, Jim Gaynor and Dr. James Dodd II.

The Star has no voice in selecting the scholarship winners.

The process starts with principals at each of the five high schools, who provide four students for consideration.

After interviewing the 20 applicants, the committee chooses one recipient from each school.

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Each student receives a \$10,000 cash prize. The recipients can use the money to further their education or pursue a career.

Including this year, the Star Leadership Award program has presented 237 area students with more

than \$672,000.

For Daniel, who loved serving on the committee last year, it was affirming, hopeful and exhilarating knowing that she again was going to have a chance to spend time with a group of 20 exceptional teenagers.

"I am a lawyer. I don't get a lot of warm fuzzies in the middle of my workweek, so it is a welcome change," she said.

Daniel said she was inspired to become a lawyer by her late father, attorney Lewis M. Costello, and by reading the novel "To Kill a Mockingbird" in middle school.

After graduating from James Wood, Daniel earned a bachelor's degree in English in 1990 from the University of Virginia and a law degree in 1993 from the University of Richmond T.C. Williams School of Law.

She worked as an associate at Martin & Seibert in Martinsburg, W.Va., for three years before her family moved to Berryville and she was hired at Hobert, Kerr & Perka.

She also worked part time from 1999 to 2004 prosecuting domestic violence and sexual assault cases for the Office of the Commonwealth's

Attorney in Winchester. Her work, completed under a grant through the federal Violence Against Women Act, could often be frustrating.

"You can become very desensitized," she said. "As soon as I started feeling that happening, I knew it was time to get somebody else to do that job. It was just too important."

Daniel takes pride in being a lawyer, saying that though the day-to-day work can feel mundane, "everything that has been an important, positive advance in American society has had lawyers involved." She carries around copies of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights in her purse.

"If I were a pastor, I would have access to the Bible as my source material," she said. "As a lawyer, it just seems like I should have access to the most important source material for lawyers."

Outside of work, Daniel said she loves to cook and travel with her family. She also serves as a board member for Blue Ridge Legal Services, which represents people in civil cases where they otherwise might not have a voice.

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