

Photograph by Pat Staub

## Determined Spirit

**H**igh school has always been a rite of passage. The precursor to college or steady work, it's the starting place for youthful independence, for grand ideas, for first loves, and quizzical questions.

In all its awkwardness, school is also a safe place for teenage kids—a place where they are the majority, and, while rules guide and encourage them, they are in charge, governing the hallways and ruling the athletic fields.

In the early 1960s, Greenville's old Sterling High School was such a place—a typical, thriving high school like any today, except that the entire student body and most faculty and administrators were African-American, making it the only all-black school in all of Greenville County, as well as a focal point of neighborhood pride.

For students, Sterling was a safe haven during a time when racial segregation and prejudice was the norm. There were no “colored only” restrooms or water fountains, no suspect stares. Students were free to express their ideas and to question authority. They were free to be teenagers.

For the kids at Sterling High, then located just off downtown Greenville's Augusta Street, where Bon Secours St. Francis Hospital's towers now loom, they were in a world of their own. Their destiny was to reshape that world, which would reshape ours, as well.

These were 16- and 17-year-old kids asking “why?” of the adults they were taught to trust and admire, and the answers these teens received simply weren't good enough for them to accept. There were almost certainly some adolescent eye-rolls that preceded their decision to act; some of them were moved into action with the support of their parents, others acted in defiance. Many of them received encouragement and support from the teachers at Sterling.

But what we might think of as typical teenage behavior took a giant leap that day in 1960, at the height of segregation, when a group of Sterling High students sat down and asked to be served, like any other customer, at a Woolworth's restaurant counter.

They were kids with questions then. They are revolutionaries today. They stood their ground and made a difference.

The school proper is no more, but Sterling remains an inspiration for the neighborhood to this day. Its original gym serves as an educational resource and community center for a neighborhood that is actively working to rebuild.

Sterling as a school and as a neighborhood has a storied past (see “If Memory Serves,” page 66). Despite the decades that have passed since 1967, when the original building burned down, and when Sterling Junior-Senior High closed its doors in 1970, a determined spirit has held on. Today, that determination is ushering the community through an aggressive and progressive revitalization, supported not only by the people who call Sterling home, but also by Greenville business leaders—people who share Sterling's address and its vision.

Only this time around, leaders are working together to make a difference. Not only do they share the common goal of reshaping the streets of Sterling, but they are striving to reshape the lives of the people who walk them.

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### CONTRIBUTORS



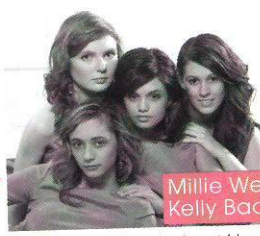
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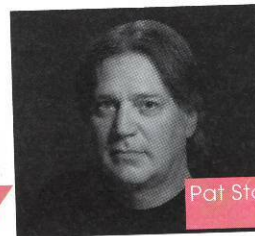
Steven  
Tingle

Steven Tingle is a writer, journalist, and single dad. When not arguing with teenagers, he writes for a variety of national and regional magazines. A former golf-course owner and restaurateur, he can hold a notebook, a seven iron, or a martini with equal expertise.



Millie Wert &  
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Millie (top left) is a junior at Harpeth Hall High School in Nashville, and was an editorial intern in January. Kelly (right) is a senior at Greenville High School. Both have an interest in journalism and fashion. Pictured with models from “Wedding Belles,” page 56.



Pat Staub

English-born photographer Pat Staub moved quite a bit during childhood with his army-captain father. These cultural experiences prompted him “to capture the inherent beauty of a commercial object, a new horizon, a celebrity, or an unnoted person.”