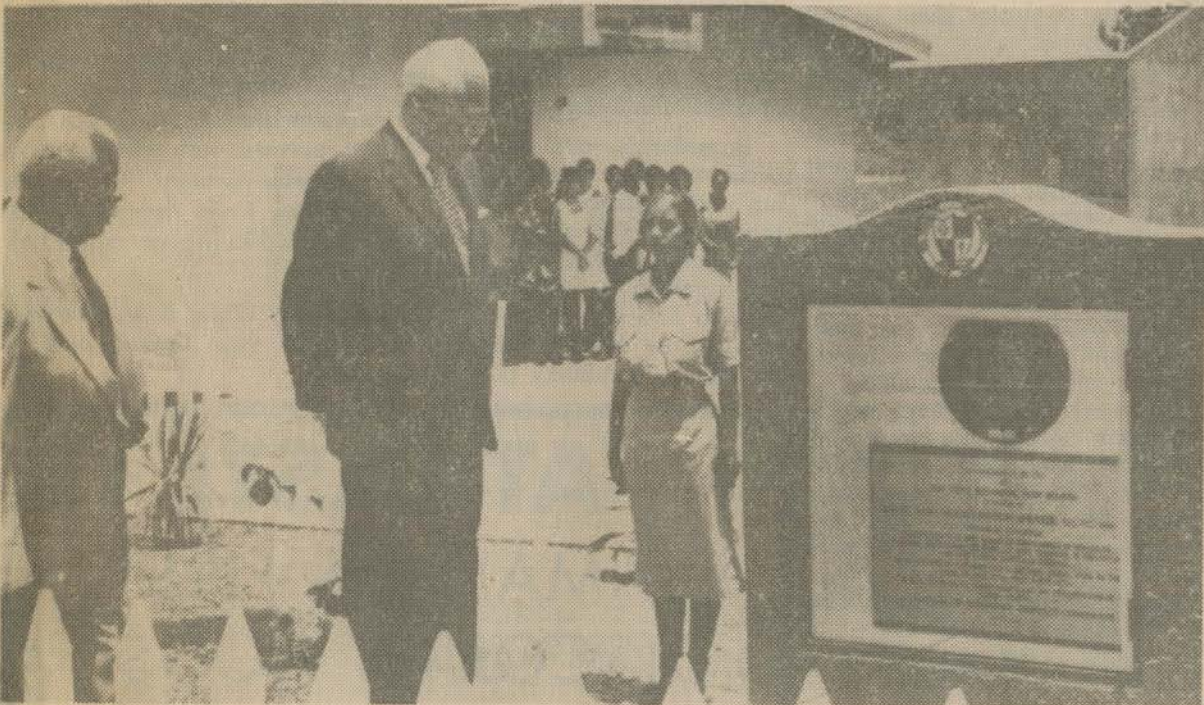


Shearer lauded as Vere Tech's 'godfather'



Junior Dowie photo

A PERMANENT MEMORIAL — Students and staffers of Vere Technical High School last Monday convened a ceremony in which they congratulated former Prime Minister Hugh Lawson Shearer for his outstanding contribution to education in the country and to Vere Tech in particular. Here Mr. Shearer pauses to read the words of a monument erected in his honour which outlines some of his achievements. Looking on is Ben Francis, principal of Vere Tech.

by MARK DAWES
Gleaner Staff Reporter

THE auditorium of the Vere Technical High School was on Monday transformed into a banquet hall, as the staffers and students from the institution feted and paid tributes to former Prime Minister, Hugh Lawson Shearer as a patron of education.

Mr. Shearer, renowned for his policy of "not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing" radiated a kind of contentment and was clearly appreciative of the gesture by the school that had come to endear itself to him.

Perhaps no one summed up the sentiments of the institution more than national athlete, Inez Turner who invited the honouree to the microphone and emphatically made the point that he held pride of place in the Vere Tech community.

She displayed one of the gold

medals she won early in her career, and in presenting it to Mr. Shearer explained: "I am not giving you a bronze medal, because you are not third place in our lives. I am not giving you a silver medal because you are not second place in our lives. I am giving you a gold medal, symbolic that you occupy first place in our lives."

Novelty

Beaming a broad smile, Mr. Shearer was clearly surprised by the novelty of the presentation, as he gave Miss Turner a warm congratulatory hug.

This special tribute to Mr. Shearer began at 3 p.m. when on arriving, he took a salute from a guard of honour comprised of the institution's cadet

force and then escorted by Vere's principal, Ben Francis, he unveiled a monument in the school yard, erected in his honour. The words etched thereon described him as a "patron of education, benefactor to a wide range of programmes in education, training and student welfare, at Vere Technical High School in particular and the school system in general."

It further described him as

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"A true champion of human rights, and the preservation of human dignity. A statesman and international personality extraordinaire."

Inside the auditorium, there seemed to have been no shortage of superlatives to describe Mr. Shearer's exemplary character and goodwill. Yet there was a sense in which successive speakers groped for just that right word to describe Mr. Shearer's relationship with the school until headboy, Casserly Campbell struck gold and received thunderous applause in his pronouncement that Mr. Shearer was indeed the "Godfather to Vere Tech."

Custos James deRoux of Clarendon, said that in the more than 30 years that he had known Mr. Shearer, he had found him to be "first and foremost a gentleman." Past student and board member, Morin Seymour, said that the school "has been blessed and privileged" to have had association with Mr. Shearer whose guidance has helped to propel the institution on "the cutting edge of education in Jamaica." If

one per cent of the population had copied his dignity and leadership, said "Teddy" McCook, president of the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association, "the country would not be in the morass it is in now."

Other tributes came from Mr. L. Bryant, on behalf of Vere's Past Student Association, while Millard McLeod, vice-principal and Mrs. C. Hines teacher, both spoke on behalf of staffers at the institution; athlete Astia Walker spoke on behalf of the Penn Relay team.

Giving his reply, Mr. Shearer hailed the students and staff for helping the institution achieve high academic standards. He congratulated the institution for the care it takes in ensuring that its physical facilities are properly maintained.

He said, "It is a good thing to hear (tributes) at the right time. I have on previous occasions quoted a verse that was told to me by my friend Lynden Newland some years ago. It says "if with pleasure you are doing anything a man is doing, don't withhold your approbation, till the person makes oration, because no care how much he shouts it,

you won't hear about it, tell it now." He added: "that's what has been done to me this afternoon. Thank you."

The eye-opener of the event came from the school's principal Ben Francis who listed some of Mr. Shearer's contributions to education much of which he said would be included in a forthcoming book he is writing about the honourees contribution to education.

According to Mr. Francis the honouree has distinguished himself in:

- Repairing a number of basic, primary and secondary schools.
- Paying the lightbill for schools disconnected for non-payment.
- Providing uniforms for students.
- Paying examination fees for students in secondary and high schools.
- Providing lunch money and bus fares for students in high schools.
- Providing scholarships of \$3,000 each for six students from the area to attend Vere.
- Mounting the largest scholarship fund for technical high schools in Jamaica of which Vere

secured 60 such scholarships.

Scholarship

● Financing the Hugh Lawson Shearer Scholarship of Excellence prize of \$1,000 each to the most outstanding boy and girl of the graduating class at Vere each year.

● Personally funding the Hugh Lawson Shearer Education Endowment to benefit the children of South East Clarendon — the fund now stands at \$119,000.

● Paying air-fares for students who get scholarships to study abroad.

● Meeting the expenses for students of the South East Clarendon community studying at local colleges and university.

● Financing a sewing machine operation training programme at Vere Tech for 400 young women from the area

● Building three classrooms at Vere Tech for students in the junior evening school.

● Donating thousands of dollars for equipment to school in the area, including computers and standby-generators.