



At the dedication of the Big Bend High School on August 2, the desert temperature soared, but the spirits of the community members were even higher. They drove through the Chihuahuan desert and down from the Chisos Mountains to attend the 5 p.m. ceremonies not far from the Mexican border. About 250 folks (a BIG turnout in this sparsely populated area) from Terlingua, Study Butte, Lajitas and Panther Junction gathered to formally declare their dream a reality and celebrate.

No one was happier than Superintendents **Shirley Coleman**, San Vicente ISD, and **Kathy Killingsworth**, Terlingua Common School, whose students will feed into the new high school. These two women, along with leaders of the Big Bend Education Corporation (BBEC), have worked for the last two years to raise funds to build the modest, but modern structure that opens its doors to about 40 students this fall.

Students in this remote area of Texas previously boarded a bus at 5:30 a.m. (4:30 a.m. for those in San Vicente located in Big Bend National Park) for Alpine 80-100 miles to the north in order to attend high school classes. The grueling trip five days a week through the desert terrain that most of us only know from western movies discouraged many of the students from ever starting high school and resulted in others dropping out before getting their diplomas.

The "longest school bus ride in the na-

tion" attracted media from across the country including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The publicity garnered donations from individuals and businesses. The BBEC solicited corporate grants and the two school districts contributed \$100,000 each. Local groups ranging from the Volunteer Fire Department to the chili cookoffs in the region also contributed funds. All this effort resulted in the school's opening debt-free and a county full of mighty proud Texans. Ironically, the largest individual donation of \$50,000 came from a California woman who read the story in *The New York Times*, but a local Terlingua businessman got things started by donating the land.

The Rev. Judith Burgess, an Episcopalian priest, serves as president of the Big Bend Education Corporation which was formed to raise money for the new school. In her remarks during the dedication ceremony, she said, "this may be a *public* school but there's been a lot of prayer to get this building built." Other dignitaries speaking at the dedication in addition to Coleman, Killingsworth and Burgess, were County Commissioner **Red Pattillo**, State Representative **Pete Gallego**, Alpine, and **Tina Hagy**, who represented State Senator **Frank Madla**. Gallago, a graduate of Alpine High School remembered how hard the desert commute was for his former classmates who rode the bus.

The "partnership" high school serving

the two small districts will be governed by an advisory board comprised of the two superintendents, a board member from each district and one member of the Big Bend Education Corporation. Killingsworth, who described the new school as "our dream that has walls" will serve as the superintendent and principal and oversee day-to-day operations.

Coleman explained that the building will also be utilized for adult education classes as well as serving as a community center for the area. As soon as Shirley Coleman took the job as superintendent in San Vicente two years ago, she eagerly joined the effort that had been talked about for ten years to get a high school.

She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Sul Ross State University in Alpine and began her career in education as a classroom teacher in Pecos. She has also served in the Bronte and Victoria school districts. Before returning to the Big Bend area two years ago, Coleman was Executive Director of Elementary Operation and Special Programs in Lancaster ISD. Active in several professional associations at the state and national level, she is a frequent presenter on topics ranging from program design to grants and budget management. She is also a three-term board member of the Texas Council for Women School Executives.

Killingsworth received her bachelor's degree from Tarleton University in



The Rev. Judith Burgess, president of the Big Bend Education Corporation, points out where donations were made to Joe Spalding, left, TEA. Seth Burgess is at right.



Region 18 ESC representatives from Midland attending the dedication ceremonies are (l-r) Gerald Ritchie, Sandra Ritchie, Martha Cavitt and David Cavitt.



TSB Educators of the Month Shirley Coleman, left, and Kathy Killingsworth are all smiles after the official ribbon cutting for the new high school. Coleman is superintendent in San Vicente and Killingsworth is superintendent in Terlingua.



Congratulating Superintendent Shirley Coleman, right, are Tina Hagge, left, administrative assistant to Senator Frank Madla, and Superintendent Judy Ledbetter, Marfa ISD.



Patrons tour the new computer lab funded by a \$150,000 TIFF Grant.

Photos by
Annell Todd
and Leigh Ward



Following the dedication ceremony, community members celebrate with refreshments.

Stephenville and her master's degree from Sul Ross State University. She has been in the Terlingua School for 10 years and has "done it all" according to her colleagues. She began as a classroom teacher then served as principal and business manager before being named superintendent. Her memberships in professional organizations include Texas Association of School Administrators, Texas Association of Rural Schools, and Texas Association of Community Schools.



Local officials join Superintendents Coleman and Killingsworth for the official ribbon cutting.