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Tunky Riley left South Carolina a better place

Last week, South Carolina lost a precious treasure. Ann "Tunky" Yarborough Riley passed away on March 7 from complications resulting from breast cancer.

Tunky Riley was not only one of the most gracious first ladies ever to reside in the Governor's Mansion, but she was also an equal partner with her husband, Dick Riley, in her commitment and devotion to pursuing programs to benefit all the citizens of South Carolina.

Many people may only know Tunky as the wife of former Gov. Dick Riley, but Tunky was so much more to those who knew her. South Carolina is a better place because of Tunky Riley and her passion, her hard work and her dedication to her state.

One of the hallmarks of the Riley administration was the passage of the Education Improvement Act, a package of public school reforms. Tunky worked tirelessly alongside her husband to achieve passage of the EIA. She headed up a statewide citizens group that enlisted parents, educators, senior citizens and many other volunteers in the effort.

Despite her diagnosis of breast cancer, she traveled the state, spreading the message that all of our children deserve a strong public school education in order to achieve their full potential.

Having been fortunate to work with Gov. Riley in his administration, I saw firsthand the partnership and devotion that the Rileys had for each other. Tunky's warmth, humility and graciousness made her a perfect first lady, and she made all visitors to the Governor's Mansion feel right at home. Her easy manner and wonderful humor were a joy to all those around her.

Tunky was also in charge of major renovations of the Governor's Mansion, the Boylston House and the Lace House. She was a strong proponent of the arts in South Carolina, and many other programs to benefit the less fortunate citizens of our state.

Tunky was extremely devoted to her family, and leaves behind a legacy of four beautiful children and 13 grandchildren.

South Carolina should consider itself a better place to live because of Tunky Riley and her lifetime of devotion to our state. For those of us fortunate to have considered Tunky Riley a friend, we shall miss her warmth, humor, cheerfulness and wisdom.

GAIL R. KINARD

Columbia