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For Immediate Release  
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## **School dedication to honor teacher – civil rights activist**

Hundreds of people are expected to attend the dedication of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School - the city's first new school in more than 50 years. The celebration will take place at **2:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 18, 2005**. The school is located at 7130 Leesburg Pike in Falls Church, Virginia.

The celebration will include student performances, video presentations, a time capsule and a surprise gift to the school. It will also include remembrances by the namesake's 88-year-old son, Dr. James H.M. Henderson.

**Background:** Mary Ellen Henderson was a teacher and longtime resident of the city of Falls Church. Her legacy includes successfully educating black children at a time when schools were segregated and there was a great disparity in resources between schools for white children and schools for black children.

Several years into her career, Mrs. Henderson studied the vast inequality in school resources and used her report to help improve the learning environment for her students. Her report showed that most white schools in Fairfax County were brick or stone, had running water, janitorial service, inside toilets and central heating, and children rode to school in heated buses. By contrast, Negro schools were wooden, had outside "pit" toilets, and had no running water, no janitorial service and no heated buses. Her efforts led to the formation of an interracial committee that persuaded the school administration to build the first new school building in the county for black students. The brick James Lee School opened its doors in 1947 and Mrs. Henderson served as principal until her retirement in 1950. The building is now known as the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church.

Honored guests at the dedication ceremony will include U.S. Congressman Jim Moran, State Senator Mary Margaret Whipple, State Delegate Jim Scott and Falls Church Mayor Dan Gardner. Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary will also attend the celebration and present a gift to the school on behalf of Virginia Governor Mark Warner.

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