

Challenge Charter School honored by national group

By JEAN BIHN
STAFF WRITER

any conflict of interest.

Greg said the passion that fueled the decision to found a school rather than retire remains intact.

"It still burns pretty brightly," he said. "Prior to (school) choice, people bought houses according to the school district they wanted. Now, we don't have to buy or sell our houses because of what we define as better education."

With Challenge Charter School students regularly meeting AYP (adequate yearly progress) and earning an Excelling label from the Arizona Department of Education's accountability ranking, the school is getting noticed by national charter school organizations.

The most recent of the many awards Challenge Charter School has garnered was the Charter School of the Year from the National Center for Education Reform.

"What the award represents is the accomplishments of the school," Miller said. "The accom-

The lyrics of Challenge Charter School's theme song accurately describe the school and its success.

♪♪♪ Come to Challenge to get the knowledge. We strive for excellence with hands-on experience. ♪♪♪ Exploring and learning our Core; Science and Technology, reading and geography we're opening a brand new door. ♪♪♪

The first "Core Knowledge" school in Arizona, Challenge began its 12th year in operation Monday with 662 K-6 students. Waiting lists are in place at all grade levels.

Greg and Pam Miller founded the school in 1996. Greg, an engineer, and Pam, a banker and former Paradise Valley Unified School District Governing Board member, took the idea of school choice and the 1990s education reform movement and ran with it.

The couple put the school in Glendale to avoid

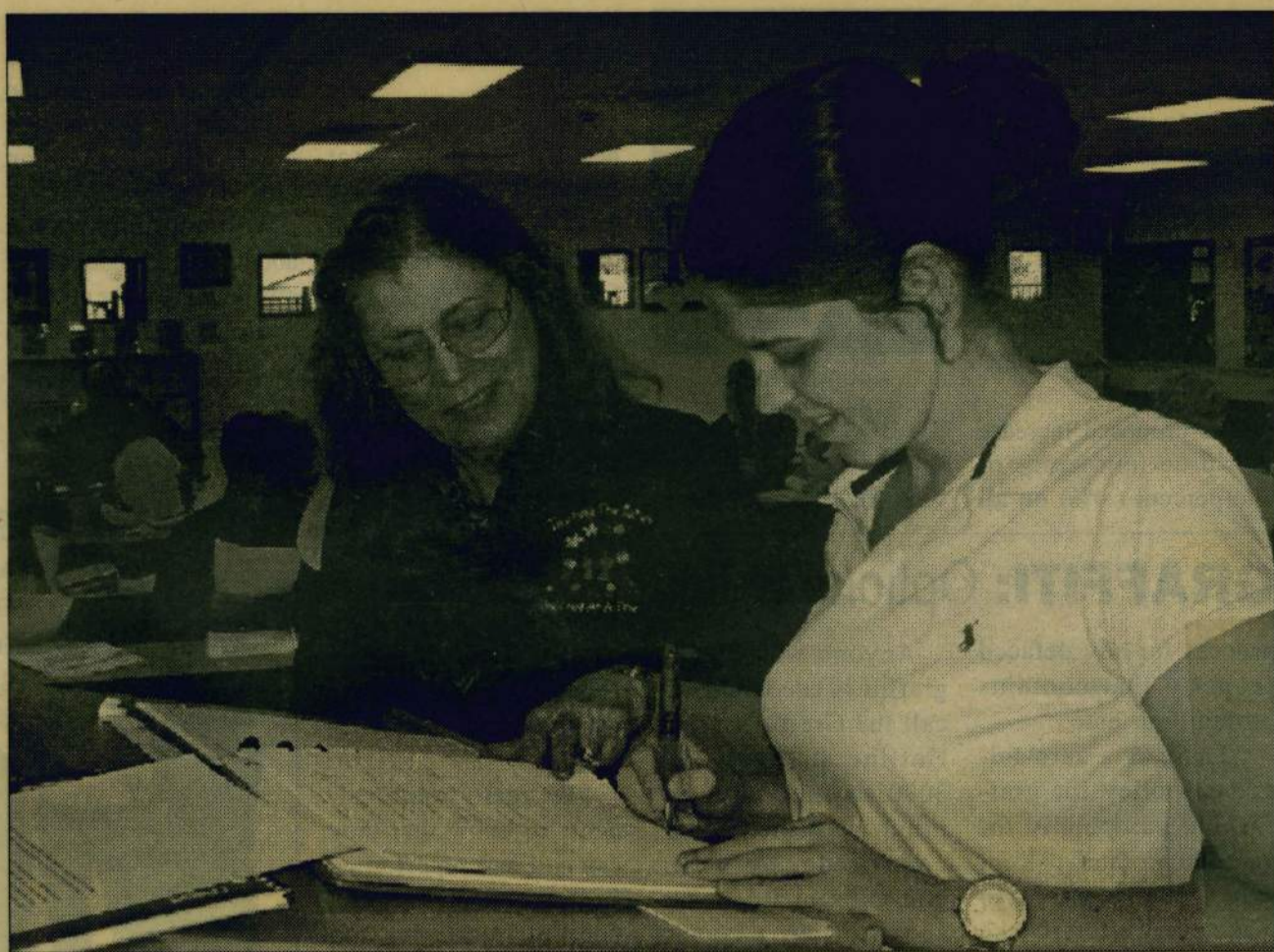


Photo by Jean Bihn

Mother/daughter duo Pam and Wendy Miller look over notes for an afternoon teacher in-service meeting at Challenge Charter School. Pam, executive director, and her husband, Greg, founded the school a dozen years ago. Wendy, a vice principal, came on board after graduating from college in 1999.

plishments of the teachers, students, parents, family and staff. I am linked to it only because I am the principal."

In June of last year, (Greg) Miller was inducted into the AZ LEADS Circle of Honor by a coalition of state education and busi-

ness leaders. A few months later, in November 2006, he was named one of 13 "principals who perform" by CER.

Pam and Greg are not the only Millers at the school — daughter, Wendy,

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is vice principal.

"We were founded on Core Knowledge because we love it and think it is the best thing for kids and our schools," Wendy said. "It is an integrated, sequential, hands-on curriculum that is content rich and provides a wide base of knowledge for learners that is expanded upon and

further developed with each concept.

"Subjects span across discipline areas using science to teach math, history to teach reading comprehension, etc. Such integration makes learning fun as it comes alive for kids. The Core Knowledge curriculum is rich in science, history, geography,

culture, and core virtues, an aligned citizenship curriculum."

One of just seven schools in the state with a 30 percent or more free and reduced lunch population to be named an "excelling school" by the ADE, Core Knowledge curriculum appears to be successful.

"If we weren't doing everything that we can for every child in every classroom, there wouldn't be any (awards)," Miller said.

Call Challenge Charter School, 5801 W. Greenbriar Drive, at (602) 938-5411 for more information.

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Photo by Jean Bihn

Greg Miller, principal of Challenge Charter School, hands out information at an Aug. 16 teachers meeting at the school.