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Tinkers in Iowa to Celebrate 50th Anniversary of Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Ruling for Student Rights

Des Moines, IA – Civil rights trailblazers Mary Beth and John Tinker will be returning to Iowa to celebrate a half-century on February 24 since their landmark student rights win at the U.S. Supreme Court.

The landmark *Tinker v. Des Moines Schools* lawsuit began when five students were suspended from their Des Moines schools for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War. After they were suspended, 13-year-old Mary Beth Tinker, 15-year-old John Tinker, and 15-year-old Christopher Eckhardt embarked on a four-year legal battle with the support of their parents. They were represented by the ACLU of Iowa by Dan Johnston, a local lawyer in his very first case after law school.

On February 24, 1969, the Court ruled 7-2 in favor of the students, stating that the First Amendment applied to public school students and writing famously that students don't "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

John Tinker will be traveling to Iowa from Missouri and Mary Beth Tinker will be traveling from Washington, D.C. A registered nurse, she is a popular speaker at schools, informing young people about their rights and responsibilities. "Students need to know their rights, along with basic civics, in order to advocate for their interests and respect the rights of others," she said.

Chris Eckhardt, the third plaintiff in *Tinker*, is deceased.

The Tinkers will arrive in Des Moines on Sunday, February 17, and will speak in a number of public schools and college classes over the following ten days.

They will also be doing a number of media interviews and will be featured at an event at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Events of note are:

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22

10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. Des Moines Public School Celebration State Historical Society of Iowa

Hundreds of students from around the state will arrive at the State Historical Building for a day with the Tinkers, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The Tinkers will be joined by Stanley Griffin, friend of the Tinkers and son of famed civil rights hero Edna Griffin, sometimes called the Rosa Parks of Iowa. They will also be joined by student journalists and advisers of The Eagle Eye, the online student newspaper of Marjory Stoneman Douglas in Parkland, Florida.

The programming will be live streamed by Iowa Public Television and later broadcast by C-SPAN.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

4:00-6:00 p.m. Raygun Student Reception

The famous and fun T-shirt store has created a special edition T-shirt just for the month of February, reading "Don't Tinker With My Rights." The store, 505 E. Grand in Des Moines, will be holding a special reception for students.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24

8:00-9:00 a.m. Mary Beth and John interviewed live on C-SPAN

2:00 p.m. Press Conference at Harding Middle School, 203 E. Euclid, Des Moines
Mary Beth and John Tinker; ACLU of Iowa Executive Director Mark Stringer and Des Moines Public Schools Superintendent Tom Ahart will speak and answer media questions.

Several student journalists and their advisers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the site of the tragic 2018 shooting, will be attending.

3:00 p.m. Community Reception at Harding Middle School, 203 E. Euclid, Des Moines

Come meet the Tinkers! Harding Junior High was the school from which Mary Beth was suspended when she was just 13. Now the school has created a memorial locker for her, and her face is on a mural in the school courtyard.

Join the ACLU and the Des Moines Schools in a family-friendly reception with refreshments to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Tinker decision. Take a photo with the Tinkers or have them sign a black armband.

Student journalists and advisers from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School will also be guests. Free and open to the public. [Details here.](#)

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25

7:30 p.m.: Stand Up! Speak Up! Youth and the First Amendment

ISU Memorial Union, Great Hall, Ames

In this panel discussion, Mary Beth Tinker and John Tinker will discuss the significance of their historic Supreme Court case, especially in the current political climate. Mark Stringer, ACLU of Iowa Director, will moderate. Part of the National Affairs series: Building a Better Democracy and the First Amendment Day series. Free and open to the public. [Details here.](#)

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26

7:30 p.m. Tinker v. Des Moines: Protecting the Voices of Our Youth

Senate Chamber, Old Capitol, Iowa City

This panel discussion will be facilitated by ACLU of Iowa Executive Director Mark Stringer. Iowa Law Professor and Director of Master of Studies in Law program Christina Bohannon will also be on the panel. [Details here.](#)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

7:00 p.m. Stand Up, Speak Up! *Tinker v. Des Moines* Turns 50

Drake Law School, Cowles Library Reading Room, 2725 University, Des Moines

Mary Beth and John, along with Drake students, will lead a conversation on the values and challenges of freedom of expression. [Details here.](#)

For a complete and current listing of events, as well as background information on the case, go to:

<https://tinkertourusa.org/tourinfo/tinker-turns-50/>

For images, many of which are for public use, go to:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Uo7hc6VPNwKKITHpSZ1PNDIIOsEGYtVL>