



News Release

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Portrait of Trailblazing Lawyer Unveiled in Historic Courthouse

FAYETTEVILLE – A portrait of the late Sylvia Ximines Allen, a longtime lawyer who achieved several historic firsts for African-Americans and women in Cumberland County and North Carolina, was unveiled in the Historic Courthouse during the 240th Anniversary Celebration of the Cumberland County Superior Court Wednesday.

The Cumberland County Bar Association and the Twelfth Judicial District Bar hosted the anniversary celebration in the Historic Courthouse, at 130 Gillespie St., following the ceremony to rename the Cumberland County Courthouse in honor of Judge. E. Maurice Braswell.

Allen's portrait will be hung on the wall in the Historic Courtroom, which features portraits of distinguished lawyers, judges and elected officials who have served Cumberland County. Resident Superior Court Judge James Ammons Jr. presided over the anniversary celebration, which was held as a special court session. Allen's daughter, attorney Elizabeth Allen, attended the ceremony and unveiled the portrait.

Sylvia X. Allen died in 2012 at the age of 88. She was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1923 and spent her childhood in Jamaica, where she was inspired by her great uncle, who was a circuit court judge, to become a lawyer. Allen moved to Philadelphia when she was 12 years old.

In 1941, Allen married obstetrician Dr. Gladstone Wesley Allen. They were married for 54 years and had eight children. Allen earned her undergraduate degree at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia and the family eventually moved to Fayetteville.

After the birth of her sixth child, Allen enrolled at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill School of Law. She commuted to law school every day, but sustained life-threatening injuries in a car accident that required hospitalization and delayed her completion of law school. Allen graduated in 1962, becoming the first African-American woman to graduate from the UNC School of Law.

Allen was in private practice in Cumberland County and was one of the original three African-American lawyers to be admitted to the Cumberland County Bar Association in 1965. In 1969, District Attorney Charles Rose appointed Sylvia Allen to his staff. She was the first African-American female assistant district attorney in Cumberland County and in the state. In 1977, Gov. Jim Hunt hired Allen to serve as an Assistant Attorney General for the North Carolina Department of Justice, a position she served through the early 1980s.

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In Cumberland County, Allen was involved in causes including fair housing, improved human services and relief from homelessness and poverty. She spearheaded the “Arms Around Fayetteville” initiative to increase awareness and raise funds for the homeless in Fayetteville in 1986.

Allen was instrumental in the passage of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday in Fayetteville. In 1983, Sylvia Allen received the North Carolina Citizen Award for her contributions to the state and in 2004, the National Bar Association Inducted her into its Hall of Fame.

Awards

Retired North Carolina Supreme Court Justice Patricia Timmons-Goodson presented a plaque of recognition from the Cumberland County Bar Association to retired Superior Court Judge Sammie Chess Jr., who was the first African-American Superior Court judge in North Carolina.

Timmons-Goodson and Rudolph Singleton each received the John B. McMillan Distinguished Service Award from the North Carolina Bar. Timmons-Goodson is a former Cumberland County District Court Judge who became the first African-American woman to serve as a justice on the North Carolina Supreme Court when she was appointed in 2006. Singleton has practiced law in Cumberland County for more than 50 years. He is an Army veteran who has been an assistant district attorney and former Fayetteville city attorney.



Left to right are Resident Superior Court Judge James Ammons, Elizabeth Allen (daughter of Sylvia X. Allen), Commissioner Jeannette Council, Commissioner Charles Evans and Kendal Tyre (husband of Elizabeth Allen). Also pictured are Eben Tyre and Isabela Tyre, children of Elizabeth Allen & Kendal Tyre and grandchildren of Sylvia X. Allen. The portrait of Sylvia Allen will be displayed in the Cumberland County Historic Courthouse at 130 Gillespie St.



Sylvia X. Allen

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