

HALL OF DISTINCTION

Class of 2021

INDUCTION CEREMONY

Thursday, September 30, 2021

Dr. Rosemary Johnson

Rosemary Woods was born in Springfield, Illinois in 1934, and was one of 12 children. She graduated from Brazil High School in Brazil, Indiana in 1952. She received her bachelor's degree from Indiana State University in 1960 and earned both her master's and doctorate degrees from Akron University.

Prior to attending college, she worked as a clerk typist for the US Government in Terre Haute, Indiana. Dr. Johnson put herself through college working as a nurse's aide at Union Hospital and then a secretary at Indiana State University.

Dr. Johnson began her career in education in 1960 as a first-grade teacher at Riley Elementary School in East Chicago, Indiana. Her family moved to Ohio in 1964 and she taught first grade at King Elementary School in Akron from 1964 – 1968. During the summers of 1964 and 1965, she served as a clerk for the Akron IRS.

In 1969, Dr. Johnson was named the Akron Public Schools Coordinator for Follow Through, a position she held until 1973. Dr. Johnson joined the Canton Local School District in 1974 as the Title III Director of Confluent Education; working with staff, students, parents, and community to provide for improved educational opportunities in the advancement of personal, cultural, and social attitudes.

Dr. Johnson held the position of Director of Confluent Education until 1977 when she became the district's Director of Human Relations. In 1980, she was named principal of Trump Elementary School, and in 1984 was named Faircrest Memorial Junior High Assistant Principal.

A student of Dr. Johnson's shared that they were involved in the Teen Talk program at Walker Jr. High that Dr. Johnson facilitated. Once a month, she'd drive a small group of students from the junior high to the elementary schools where they would provide mentoring programs and activities with the younger students.

Another student shared that when Dr. Johnson was the principal at Trump Elementary she helped discover that her brother had a learning disability and made sure that he received the services and interventions needed.

Learning of Bill Hayden's plan for retirement, Dr. Johnson applied for her "dream position" as superintendent of Canton Local Schools. Dr. Johnson was named Hayden's successor, and in 1986 became the first female superintendent of Canton Local Schools. She was the second black woman in Ohio to be appointed superintendent of a school district; the first being named that same month to a school district in East Cleveland.

Dr. Johnson worked with Mr. Hayden from August of 1985 through January of 1986 when she officially took the helm of the office.

In a letter to district employees, the board of education wrote, "(Dr. Johnson) is extremely well-respected in our school district and her reputation as an administrator and an educator is held in high esteem throughout Stark County and the state of Ohio. Her integrity, spirit of enthusiasm, and her capabilities of keen insight into educational programs and developments will be a tremendous asset to the continued success of our educational philosophy and program."

Dr. Johnson was diagnosed with cancer in 1985. She received chemotherapy treatment that year and was thought to be in remission. Unfortunately, her cancer returned. She served as superintendent from January through March before succumbing to the illness on April 10, 1986.

Dr. Johnson enjoyed distance running and was a very good left-handed golfer, winning several trophies. She also played the piano and according to her daughter Karen, "made the best homemade fudge."

Dr. Johnson had four children: sons Aaron E. Mitchell and Larry W. Mitchell, daughter Karen M. Grant and stepson Michael Johnson; two grandsons, Tevin Mitchell and William Grant; two granddaughters, Camille Sims and Sarah Grant; great-grandson Derrick Sims; and great-granddaughter Camara Sims.

Dr. Johnson's dedication to the entire process of education persuaded her immediate family to establish an annual scholarship in her name to be awarded to a deserving senior at Canton South High School.