

# Ora H. "Herb" Ellis Sr.



Age 98, passed away peacefully at the United Methodist Retirement Center, Towsley Village in Chelsea, MI on Thursday July 10, 2014. Herb was born on March 23, 1916, the seventh of 10 children born to Whit and Maggie (Riley) Ellis in Chandler, OK. His parents strongly emphasized education as a means to providing opportunities in life. Herb received his B.A. from Langston University (1940), the same alma mater as his nine brothers and sisters. In 1942, Herb migrated to Ann Arbor where several family members were attending the University of Michigan. That same year, Herb met the love of his life, Virginia Wilson, and they were married the following year. During WWII, he worked at the Willow Run bomber plant. After the war, Herb enrolled in the University of Michigan where he obtained two Masters Degrees (Education, 1948; Public Health, 1949). Not long after graduation, he became involved in the community by serving on a number of committees and boards including the committee for the planning of Huron High School (1956), the committee to establish Washtenaw County Community Mental Health Center (1956), the committee to study New St. Joseph Hospital location (1958) and the committee to Establish Washtenaw County Community College (1960). Former Ann Arbor Mayor, Cecil Creal, appointed Herb to the Washtenaw County Board of Supervisors in 1958. He was elected to the newly formed Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners in 1968, representing District 12 (Ann Arbor) until 1982. He was the first Black elected to the County Board of Commissioners. In 1971, his fellow board members elected him Chair of the Board, another first for a Black person. Herb retired from politics in 1982, having served for 22 years as a county official. After becoming a member of the Ann Arbor Rotary Club in 1963, he was given the honor of the Paul Harris award in 1983 by Rotary International, an award he was most proud to receive. Herb continued his community service by serving as Chair of the Senior Citizens Guild of Ann Arbor (1974-76), Chairperson to select and employ the new position of Washtenaw County Administrator (1977) and Vice-Chair of the Washtenaw County Community Mental Health Board. In 1977, he was selected by United States Congressman Carl Pursell to discuss Federal funding for Suburban needs with President Carter's Administration. Although he valued a role in the community, having been raised in a family that embraced education made his true passion educating young people. 1956, Herb became the second Black educator employed by the Ann Arbor Public School system. Herb was a science teacher at Pioneer High School until 1971, when he moved to the newly formed Community High School where he became its first science teacher. He also served on the planning committee for the Establishment at Community High School (1970). In 1969, Herb was honored by his fellow teachers by being named Ann Arbor Public School "Teacher of the Year," an award he cherished. Herb retired from teaching in 1980. An avid fan of Michigan Football, Herb attended games for over 60 years. He made several bowl trips with the school, but particularly enjoyed the Rose Bowl experience. Herb and Virginia ("Ginny" to her friends) traveled extensively throughout the world including Europe, Japan, Greece, Turkey, The Philippines, India, Russia, Scandinavia, North America, the Caribbean and parts of the Middle East. They especially enjoyed visiting Cancun, Mexico and had a vacation villa there for many years. Together, the passionate couple volunteered as counselors and advisors to the Youth for Understanding Program, an international cultural exchange organization that was based in Ann Arbor. Representing Y.F.U, they participated as hosts and sponsors for foreign youths living in Ann Arbor and other parts of Michigan. Herb enjoyed

music and could often be heard singing at home accompanied by Virginia, who was an excellent pianist. Friends would request his strong, soulful voice at funerals and other private events. Even in his late nineties, staff at the retirement center would comment on his wonderful talents. Preceding Herb in death was his wife of 47 years, Virginia; his brothers, Whit Jr., Cliff, Wade, Jim, Hasko, Frank; and sisters, Roberta and Ann; sister-in-law and husband, Blanche and Thomas Bridge; and grandchild, Steven. He is survived by his sons, Herb, Jr. and Jeff (Bonnie); and three grandchildren, Keri, Jon and Carlye. Visitation to be held on Monday, July 21, 2014 from 5:30-7:30 PM at Nie Funeral Home, 3767 W. Liberty Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Funeral Service on Tuesday, July 22, 2014 at 10 AM at Nie Funeral Home with visitation starting at 9 AM prior to the service. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that gifts in memory of O. Herbert Ellis be given to the Michigan Alzheimer Association.



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