

August 7, 2017

African-American Heritage Trail adds marker near Keeler Memorial Building

MOBILE, Alabama — The Mobile County Health Department was the location recently for the unveiling of the newest historical marker on the Dora Franklin Finley African-American Heritage Trail. The placard honors Vivian Malone Jones, the first African-American graduate of the University of Alabama.

The marker can be found at 760 Saint Anthony Street. Now the parking lot for MCHD's Keeler Memorial Building, this was the site of Mrs. Jones' childhood home. Born on July 15, 1942, Mrs. Jones passed away on October 13, 2005.

"We are honored to have the historical marker placed here," said Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, Health Officer for Mobile County. "This part of Mobile is rich in history. Dunbar Elementary was the site of Alabama's first medical college. Mobile City Hospital treated the sick for more than a century. And our building traces its legacy back to the U.S. Marine Hospital in the 1840s.

"The marker represents an important part of Mobile's history. It reminds everyone about the heroic efforts of Vivian Malone."

One side of the marker states:

"On May 30, 1965, Vivian Malone, became the first African-American to graduate from the University of Alabama. To achieve admission at the all-White university, she was forced to confront then Governor, George C. Wallace, in what has become known as 'The Stand at the Schoolhouse door.' Supported by President John F. Kennedy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy and the National Guard, she and James Hood enrolled on June 11, 1963. Vivian's courage, tenacity, self-confidence and intelligence enabled her to overcome extraordinary obstacles, culminating in her historic graduation. Mrs. Vivian Malone Jones' career began with the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division in Washington, D.C. She was a national advocate for Civil Rights, Environmental and Social Justice, Voter's Rights and Women's Health Initiatives. The Vivian Malone Jones Endowed Scholarship for Diversity is awarded annually to a deserving student at the University of Alabama."

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The other side of the marker continues her story:

“Born in Monroe County, Alabama and a graduate of Central High School in Mobile, Mrs. Jones gave the commencement address to the 2000 graduating class of the University of Alabama during which she orated: ‘There will come a day in your life when you must act for others, your family, perhaps your community, and you must be ready! So, take from all the books you have read, all the lessons you have learned, the certain knowledge that one day, any day, you must be bold, have courage and walk through a door that leads to opportunity for others.’”

According to the American National Biography Online (<http://www.anb.org/articles/15/15-01340.html>), she began her education at what is now Alabama A&M University. Since the Huntsville school was unaccredited, she applied to the Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration at the University of Alabama. She was admitted with another black student, James Hood.

However, Gov. Wallace blocked the entrance to Foster Auditorium when it was time to register for classes. It was not until Alabama’s National Guard was federalized that Wallace relented.

Jones went on to graduate with honors. Hood dropped out of school two months after enrolling, but later returned to earn a doctorate in 1997.

The marker is the newest stop on the Dora Franklin Finley African-American Heritage Trail. After retiring from Kimberly-Clark paper company, Finley was asked by then City Councilman William Carroll to establish a heritage trail that focused on the contributions of past generations. After she passed away in 2012, her brother Judge Karlos F. Finley assumed the title of president for the organization. He oversaw the dedication ceremony. Margie Malone Tuckson, sister of the honoree, unveiled the marker.

“We salute Dora Finley for her vision in recognizing important African-Americans in our community,” Dr. Eichold said. “She was a wonderful lady with whom I had the pleasure of serving with on the Community Foundation of South Alabama.”

The heritage tour includes more than 40 stops throughout Mobile. For a map of the locations, please visit <http://www.dffaaht.org>.



VIVIAN MALONE JONES

July 15, 1942 - October 13, 2005

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