

Brief Bio of Dr. William E. Finlayson for Official Street Rename

Over time, Milwaukee like all municipalities, has honored the memory of its leading citizens thru the names bourn by buildings, schools, parks, and streets. The founders of the city live on in street names such as Juneau, Kilbourn, and Walker. More recently, civil rights activist such as Martin Luther King, Jr and Vel Phillips have likewise been memorialized.

It is now time to consider another towering figure in Milwaukee's history – that being Dr. William E. Finlayson. Retired physician, Dr. William E. Finlayson has a long and distinguished history of service in the City of Milwaukee that dates back to his arrival in the city in 1958. He practiced obstetrics and gynecology for 39 years. Affectionately called the “baby doctor” by many, it's estimated that he's delivered roughly 10,000 children and has touched countless lives in the community both personally and professionally.

A son of the South, he arrived as thousands of African Americans, mostly from the South as well, were flocking to the city in search of employment opportunities and greater freedom. There was great need within this exploding population for professional services. He came prepared to serve, with a wealth of talent and experience.

Service was his watchword from a young age, given that he grew up in the Baptist church and was the son of a prominent Florida minister. Barely out of high school, Finlayson served in the Army for three years during WWII and achieved the rank of First Lieutenant. With the benefit of the GI Bill, Finlayson attended the historical black college of Morehouse along with other leaders such as classmate and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brother Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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He went on to earn a medical degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, a matriculate to post-graduate study at Meharry and the University of Minnesota. Following that, he settled in Milwaukee with his wife and young sons.

In the late 50s, Milwaukee offered many opportunities to its new arrivals. It was a prosperous city with a strong industrial base, but it was not without racial discrimination. Finlayson quickly became aware of the more subtle forms of segregation in the city and made it his business to break down barriers and open doors for those less fortunate than himself.

He was most interested in the city's institutions, particularly those with little to no black representation. He has served at the University of Wisconsin and the Medical College of Wisconsin. While at the Medical College, he was instrumental in increasing the diversity of the student body when he served on the admission's committee.

He is a past president of the Milwaukee Gynecological Society and the past national chair of the section of Obstetricians-Gynecologists for the National Medical Association. He earned fellowships in both the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the American College of Surgery.

As a member of the American Medical Association he served as a delegate to the State and County Medical Societies and lobbied for the passage of Medicare. He was a founding member and stock holder of a new insurance company featuring malpractice insurance at the height of the malpractice crisis in the state. He was a charter member of Prime Care, the largest HMO in the state.

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But medicine was far from his only interest. He was also concerned for the economic health of his community. Noting that it was under served by financial institutions, he was instrumental in the founding of North Milwaukee State Bank. He served as the chairman of the board for 26 of the over 40 years of the bank's existence. The institution was the first African American bank in the history of the state. He was a charter member and president of the Garfield Foundation, which supported the Opportunities and Industrialization Center.

Finlayson's social conscience prompted him to push for the establishment of a state of the art YMCA facility on the near Northside in mid-1960s. He served as President of Board of Directors for fundraising through groundbreaking and construction. Around that same time, in 1964, as president of Delta Chi Lambda the local alumni chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc he spearheaded an effort to bring his former classmate, fraternity brother and friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Milwaukee.

Like King, Finlayson has been a drum major for justice. He is a Golden Heritage life member of the NAACP. And on the local level, he was a founding member of the Milwaukee African American Council, a think tank composed of prominent African American leaders.

More recently, Finlayson organized the W.E.B. DuBois Club. The club provides mentoring and guidance to young African American high-school males. With the support of his Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, the club encourages intellectual development as well as financial literacy. Finlayson also recently received Milwaukee's 2019 Living Legend Award.

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The awards and honors he has amassed throughout his nearly 95 years of life are too numerous to name, but all point to the reason to maintain his legacy for future generations in concrete ways.