

Judge Motley Scholarship Awarded

By Hon. C. Ian McLachlan

The Rotary Club of Chester, Conn., recently announced the creation of a scholarship in the name of the late Judge Constance Baker Motley. The scholarship is to be awarded to a young person from the New Haven area, who will be attending Camp Hazen, a YMCA camp located in Chester. Judge Motley was a U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of New York. She grew up in New Haven and was a part-time Chester resident until her death in September of 2005. Camp Hazen is located near where Judge Motley resided with her husband.

The first recipient of the scholarship will be entering the seventh grade and lives with her mother in the New Haven area. Originally born in Sierra Leone, Africa, the recipient and her family spent two years in a refugee camp in Zambia before coming to Chester in 2000. The family soon relocated to New Haven where her mother has been working and studying to become a nurse. The scholarship is for a two-week overnight session and includes allowances at the camp store and for necessities while the recipient is staying at the camp.

Inspirational Book

The Rotary Club became interested in this project when Nancy Byrne, a member of the club and neighbor of Judge Motley's on Cedar Lake Road near Camp Hazen, commented on the judge's death last year. Byrne noted that she had not been aware of Judge Motley's remarkable history as a civil rights pioneer until she read the judge's autobiography, *Equal Justice Under Law: The Life of a Pioneer for Black Civil Rights and Women's Rights*.

Judge Motley received her undergraduate degree from New York University in 1943 and her law degree from Columbia University in 1946. She worked as an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund between 1946 and 1965. In 1964, Judge Motley was the first African-American woman elected to the New York State Senate. Between 1965 and 1966, she served as president of the Borough of Manhattan.

In 1966, Judge Motley was appointed to the federal bench by President Lyndon Johnson. She was the first African-American woman appointed as a federal district judge. She served as a district judge in the Southern District of New York from 1966 until the time of her death in September of 2005. Between 1982 and 1986, Judge Motley served as the Chief Judge of the court.

NAACP Cases

Prior to her appointment to the bench, Judge Motley had been involved for almost 20 years in virtually all of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund's successes, including *Brown v. the Board of Education* and *Meredith v. Fair*. The *Meredith* case resulted in James Meredith being admitted to the University of Mississippi.

Judge Motley had a summer residence in Chester for many years and, in recent years was virtually a full-time resident. While reciting some of the details of Motley's remarkable life, Byrne noted that Clarence Blakeslee, a white contractor from New Haven, was so impressed by the young Constance Baker that he offered to pay for her college education.

Judge Motley termed that a life-altering event. That experience, as related by Judge Motley, was the inspiration for the Chester Rotary Club to create a scholarship in her name.

Editor's note: Judge C. Ian McLachlan is a member of the Connecticut Appellate Court.