

LIFE AND EDUCATION

Evelyn Reid Syphax devoted a lifetime of work to the Arlington community. Born in Lynchburg, VA, in 1926, to Reverend John Baptist Reid and Pauline Vaughan Reid, she earned a bachelor's degree in English and Language Arts from Virginia Union University (VUU) in 1948, and a master's degree in Early Childhood Education from New York University in 1954.



Evelyn Reid ca. 1945.

She moved to Arlington in 1951 and taught third and fourth grade as a language arts and reading specialist within the Arlington Public Schools (APS) system for more than twenty years. Her retirement from APS in 1972 was short-lived when Superintendent John Gossling asked her to continue serving as a teacher.

While teaching at Langston Elementary, she met Archie Douglas Syphax, one of the County's first paid African American firefighters. Archie was a member of the long-standing Syphax family, established in Arlington for generations. Evelyn and Archie married in 1956 and raised two children, Archie Douglas ("Doug") Syphax, Jr., and Craig Custis Syphax.

EVELYN REID SYPHAX

CHAMPION FOR EDUCATION

Evelyn Syphax advocated for enrichment classes such as creative writing, drama, and debate, and used field trips to promote history and art. Since Arlington County did not provide preschool for African Americans, she launched the Syphax Child Care Center in 1963, where her son Doug was the first child enrolled. She also started and directed the first Montessori School program in Arlington from 1966 to 1987. She created exciting and cultured school programs, recruiting teachers spanning the globe for a multicultural environment.



Evelyn Reid Syphax and VUU classmate Governor Wilder meet President Clinton in 1994.

Evelyn Syphax championed children's rights through her appointment to the Arlington School Board as Vice-Chairman (1981) and Chairman (1983). Teaching during segregation and desegregation, she recalled the uneven provisions for white and Black students. She was instrumental in overhauling the County's 1971 bussing plan to reduce long bus rides for non-white students and showed that the desegregation plan was outmoded and discriminatory.

LEADERSHIP

Evelyn Syphax's leadership extended both locally and statewide. She served as Chairman of the Arlington Child Care Advisory Committee, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the State Advisory Council on Vocational Education, and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Northern Virginia Private Schools Association. Upon discovering there was no Northern Virginia chapter of her beloved Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (AKA), she founded the Zeta Chi Omega chapter in 1956, becoming President of the local chapter, and Director of the Mid-Atlantic region from 1978 to 1982. Through AKA she multiplied the impact of her service to the Black community.



Evelyn Reid Syphax with her son Rev. A.D. Syphax Jr., M.Div. at the Top Ladies of Distinction Gala in 1992.

Syphax was a resolute problem solver. She founded, joined, and organized many committees and organizations, including the Links, Inc., Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc., Jack and Jill of America, Inc., Girl Friends, Inc., the National Council for Negro Women, and the NAACP. She was the Founder and first President of the Northern Virginia chapter of the Coalition of 100 Black Women, and founded El Derlee, a residential home for seniors.

CHARITY

Evelyn Syphax was devoted to community history. She was President of the Arlington Historical Society and fought to recognize the lost site of Freedman's Village. In 1999, she donated \$25,000 through the Arlington Community Foundation to establish the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington. In 1990, she donated \$1,000,000 to her alma mater VUU, the largest amount ever donated by a single graduate. In 1991, she also donated to St. Paul's College in Lawrenceville, VA, for their child development center.



Evelyn Reid Syphax receiving her honorary doctorate in May 1991 from VUU with her sons Rev. A.D. Syphax Jr., M.Div. (left) and Craig Custis Syphax (right). She received honorary doctorates from St. Paul's College and Lynchburg College in the same year.

HONORS

Evelyn Syphax received multiple honors throughout her life. In 1981, the Interservice Club Council nominated her as the Arlington Woman of the Year. The Arlington County Commission on the Status of Women recognized her as a 'Notable Woman of Arlington' in 1992. She received honorary doctorates from St. Paul's College, Lynchburg College, and her alma mater VUU. After Dr. Syphax's death in March 2000, many groups she had championed honored her memory. The VUU recognized her legacy by renaming its school of education, psychology and interdisciplinary studies after her. The Arlington School Board voted unanimously to name the APS administrative offices in front of you at 2110 Washington Blvd. the "Syphax Education Center."



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