

**Obituaries**

# Robert B. Howard, Jr., African-American pioneer in Buffalo Fire Dept.

Robert B. Howard, Jr., 91, of Williamsville, the first African-American firefighter, lieutenant, captain, and commissioner for the Buffalo Fire Department, died Thursday, April 12, 2007, in the Center for Hospice & Palliative Care in Cheektowaga.

Born in Barnesville, Ga., his family moved to Chattanooga, Tenn. when he was one-year old then relocated to the Town of Tonawanda when he was six.

Mr. Howard attended Hardin Elementary School in the Town of Tonawanda and graduated from Kenmore High School in 1934. He attended Buffalo College Center for two years.

Mr. Howard worked on a cruise ship, the Juniata, as a bellhop during the summer of 1935 while he was still attending the College Center. He also worked as a receiving clerk at the Buffalo Artistic Upholstering Co. for a year and at Semet Solvay Co.

from 1937 to 1943.

Mr. Howard attempted to enter the police academy but turned his attention to the Buffalo Fire Department. On June 16, 1943, he became the first African-American appointed to the Buffalo Fire Department and was assigned to Truck 3, then located at 308 Spring St.

During his long, distinguished career in the Buffalo Fire Department, Mr. Howard received numerous promotions that resulted in increasing responsibility. In 1951, he was promoted to junior captain, now known as lieutenant, and remained at Truck 3.

In 1960, Mr. Howard was promoted to captain and reassigned to Engine 26 at Tonawanda Street and Progressive Avenue. On Jan. 1, 1966, he again made history when he was appointed fire commissioner by Mayor Frank Sedita.

Mr. Howard retired in 1973 after 30 years of service but continued to be involved in organizations involving firefighters.

Mr. Howard was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Fire Protection Association in 1972 and a year later joined the staff of that organization as chief fire

service specialist. He was named field service representative of the NFPA in 1974.

Mr. Howard is an honorary life member of several volunteer fire companies in New York State and a life member of Erie County New York Fire Chiefs Mutual Aid Association. His other memberships included the New York State Fire Chiefs Association, Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts, Advisory Committee New York State Civil Service Commission and Board of Directors of the Salvation Army of Boston.

Mr. Howard held a board membership and was the chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Buffalo Fire Department Officers Association. He was also the secretary and member of the board of the Metropolitan Committee of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, a member of the Joint Council of National Fire Service Organizations, and a member of the Fire Officers Qualifications Standards Committee.

In addition, Mr. Howard served on the Canisius College Board of Regents, Emergency Hospital Board of Governors, Western New

York Burn Treatment Center, National Conference of Christians and Jews (Buffalo affiliate), Salvation Army Board, Buffalo Goodwill Industries, Comprehensive Health Planning Council, Western New York Task Force Committee for Child Abuse, Columban Retreat League, Downtown First Friday Club, Buffalo Yacht Club (honorary member), Our Lady of Charity Refuge Home, Brothers of Mercy Sacred Heart Home, Chamber of Commerce Buffalo Unlimited Committee, Diocesan Lay Advisory Committee, Niagara Frontier Council of Boy Scouts of America and the Rotary Club of Buffalo.

He also was a member of St. Gregory the Great Parish, Council No. 184 Knights of Columbus, 4th degree and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

His wife of 60 years, the former Irene Battle, died in 1998.

Mr. Howard is survived by a daughter, Jean M. Holland of Williamsville; a brother, Dr. Keith L. of Olean; and two grandchildren.

Prayers were offered Monday, April 16 in Amigone Funeral Home followed by a Mass of Christian Burial in St. Gregory the Great Church.



**Howard**



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## Dr. Ralph E. Peters, physician

Dr. Ralph Edward Peters, 84, a Cheektowaga physician for 42 years, died Monday, March 26, 2007, in his Williamsville home.



**Peters**

Born in Buffalo, he was a 1940 graduate of St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute and earned a bachelor's degree from Canisius College in 1944. After two years in the Navy, he attended Georgetown University Medical School, receiving his degree in 1950.

Dr. Peters served his internship at Sisters Hospital and his residency in internal medicine and cardiology fellowship at the former E.J. Meyer Memorial Hospital. He was a founding staff physician at St. Joseph Hospital in Cheektowaga and an attending physician at Sisters Hospital.

Dr. Peters maintained offices at

various locations in the Harlem Road-Wehrle Drive area of Cheektowaga and was joined in his practice by his daughter Nancy in 1985. He retired in 1996.

For several years, he was a member of the Singing Doctors, a group of doctors at Sisters Hospital, that performed in nursing homes and at special occasions. For about 20 years, Dr. Peters raised quarter horses at his home. One of his mares won a state championship in halter.

Dr. Peters enjoyed gardening and maintaining an apple orchard. He also enjoyed a 75-acre

country retreat in Cattaraugus County, as well as hunting, fishing, and camping.

He was a parishioner at SS. Peter & Paul Church for more than 50 years.

Dr. Peters is survived by his wife of 54 years, the former Josephine LoGrasso; two sons, Ralph E. Jr. and John P.; and three daughters, Barbara Ritchie, Mary Hogle, and Dr. Nancy.

Services were held Friday, March 30 in Dietrich Funeral Home followed by a Mass of Christian Burial in SS. Peter & Paul Church.

## Dorothy Retallack, former school bus driver

Dorothy Retallack, 92, of Clarence, a retired school bus driver for the Kenmore-Tonawanda Union Free School District, died Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2007, at St. Joseph Hospital, Cheektowaga.

Born Dorothy Molloy, she grew up in Buffalo, graduating from Bennett High School. She was an accomplished tennis player in her youth.

Mrs. Retallack enjoyed cooking, sewing, ceramics and quilting.

Mrs. Retallack is survived by two sons, Robert G. and William J.; two daughters, Ruth Anne Blair and Elizabeth Wilson; a sister, Katherine Ledwin; eight grandsons and five great-grandchildren.

Her husband, George F., died in 1963. A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, April 28 in Our Lady of Peace Church, 10950 Main St., Clarence.



**Retallack**

## Ethel B. Henning, family owned Winter's Grill

Ethel B. Henning, 86, of Williamsville, died Saturday, April 14, 2007, in Clarence.

Born Ethel Winter in Egbertsville, she lived in Williamsville for 54 years. Her family once owned the former Winter's Grill on Main Street in Williamsville.

She was an inspector for the Board of Elections and belonged to ladies auxiliaries at Main-Transit Fire Department., Hutchinson Hose Fire Company and Veterans

of Foreign Wars. She was also a route distributor for The Buffalo News and was known as the snack lady at Maple East Elementary School.

Mrs. Henning is survived by two sons, Robert and Nicholas; three daughters, Denise Riley, Linda, and Darlene; a brother, John; 16 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.

Services were private. Arrangements were made by Beach-Tuyn Funeral Home.

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