

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mrs. Eugenia B. Thomas has been honored through the naming of the Eugenia B. Thomas K-8 Center in the City of Doral, Florida. Her commitment to education, children and our community has earned her many accolades and awards but her desire and determination to improve our society and address the issues that concern our children is what truly makes her an icon in our community.

## **BEGINNINGS**

Eugenia B. Thomas was born on November 24, 1924 in Atlanta, Georgia and came to Miami in 1929 where she was adopted by the Bell family. Mr. Bell was a horticulturist and a prominent Deacon in Dade County and Sarah Bell was his wife. She attended Booker T. Washington High School where she graduated class valedictorian in 1940.

## **EDUCATION AND CAREER**

After graduating from high school, with high achieving academic records, she attended Florida Memorial University where she also graduated with honors (*Magna Cum Laude*) in 1945. She then graduated from Biscayne Development Executives and Fordham School of Public Speaking. Mrs. Thomas worked as a Dade County administrator and later as a legal secretary for many years. She assisted Gwendolyn Cherry in opening the first Dade County offices of the Legal Services Department. Mrs. Thomas continued to work in various departments for almost 30 years until 1966 when she retired. She was selected as the state's first African-American woman president of the Florida Parent Teacher Association from 1988-1990.

## **FAMILY LIFE**

The happiest time of her life was during her marriage to a gentleman named Lawson E. Thomas; they married on December 26, 1953. Her husband was the first African-American judge in the south since Reconstruction. He was very influential in the African-American community and did a lot of work during the Civil Rights Movement as a pioneer in Miami's African-American community. The late Judge Lawson E. Thomas and Mrs. Eugenia B. Thomas have made solid imprints in Miami's history. As an attorney, his skillful advocacy resulted in many noteworthy legal victories on behalf of his clients. He helped lead the fight to equalize salaries for black and white teachers and was instrumental in foregoing a compromise between protests and county government over the lack of blacks to serve on local juries. Judge Thomas' contribution to his community and profession is recognized daily in the Lawson E. Thomas Courthouse Center in Downtown Miami.

## **AWARDS**

As a tribute to his parents, John Thomas, Director of Legislative Policies for the Florida League of Cities in Tallahassee, created the Lawson E. and Eugenia B. Thomas Advocacy Fund. This charitable fund will continue the family's tradition of giving, civic engagement and community advocacy.

Throughout her lifelong dedication and excellence to community service, Mrs. Thomas has been honored with many awards. The following are just some of the numerous awards she has received:

- Sarah Blocker Meritorious Service Award – Florida Memorial University, March 18, 2005
- The Black Archives – 2005 Pioneer Family of Miami
- City of Doral: Eugenia B. Thomas Day – November 24, 2003
- Miami-Dade County African-American Honoree – Bellsouth, February 2000
- Distinguished Service Citation, The Rotary Club of Doral - December 16, 2005
- The Whitney M. Young, Jr. Memorial Humanitarian Award in Health & Welfare – 1989
- Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Beta Tu Zeta Chapter Outstanding Achievement as Florida PTA President – 1988
- Sigma Alpha Chapter Omega Psi Fraternity, Inc. – Citizen of the Year 1987
- Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Beta Tu Zeta Chapter Minority Woman of the Year – 1984
- Alpha Chi Sorority for 25 years of Service – 1970
- Rotary Club of Doral – Most Influential VIP – 2006

## **LEGACY**

Mrs. Eugenia B. Thomas's dedication and community work has been honored through the naming of the Eugenia B. Thomas K-8 Center in the City of Doral in 2001. Mrs. Thomas passed away on August 17, 2014 at the age of 90.