

Obituaries/Faith Directory

Dr. John M. Ellison Jr., 87, pioneering dentist

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Dr. John Malcus Ellison Jr. helped break down racial barriers as a practicing dentist for more than 53 years in Virginia.

In 1947, Dr. Ellison became the first black dentist to set up practice in Williamsburg, his family said.

He boldly opened his first office across the street from the College of William and Mary in the heart of the city during the era of rigid segregation.

Six years later, after resettling in Northern Virginia, Dr. Ellison became the first black dentist in Arlington, his family said. Known for serving everyone who came to his office regardless of their ability to pay, he practiced until he retired in 2003 after a half-century.

Known affectionately as "Mac" to his friends, Dr. Ellison died Monday, June 30, 2008, in a Washington hospital. He was 87.

Born in Northumberland County, Dr. El-

lison was the son of Dr. John M. Ellison Sr., who also broke new ground at Virginia Union University in 1941 when he became the first black person and first alumnus to serve as president of the Richmond school.

His father was president of VUU when Dr. Ellison received his undergraduate degree from the school in 1943. He went on to earn his doctor of dentistry degree at Howard University's School of Dentistry in 1947 and moved to Williamsburg to start practice.

After marrying Ethel Crawford in 1948, his private practice was interrupted when he was inducted into the Air Force. With the military being desegregated by order of President Harry S. Truman, Dr. Ellison pioneered in the service as the



Dr. Ellison

first black dentist assigned to Mitchell Air Force Base in Long Island, N.Y.

After his discharge in 1953, he returned to Northern Virginia to practice in Arlington. Along with his private practice, he also was the longtime dentist for children in the Arlington Public Schools.

He had well-connected patients, including the Liberian ambassador and his family, his relatives noted.

But it also was not uncommon for Dr. Ellison to bring home vegetables, fruit, baked goods and puppies and rabbits that he received as payment from rural patients with little money.

Dr. Ellison was active in professional groups, including the Northern Virginia Dental Society. He also was a former presi-

dent of the Old Dominion Dental Society, a longtime member of the National Dental Society and a fellow in the Academy of General Dentistry.

Dr. Ellison was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He and his wife, who were married nearly 60 years, also traveled widely. He also was an avid golfer and amateur photographer.

His family and friends paid final tributes to Dr. Ellison Wednesday, July 9, at Peoples Congregational Church in Washington.

His survivors also include his son, John M. Ellison III; two daughters, Deborah E. Farris and Sheryl Ellison-Blue; his sister, Mable E. Scoggins; and three grandchildren.

The family requests memorial contributions be made to the Dr. John M. Ellison Memorial Scholarship Fund, Office of Institutional Advancement, Virginia Union University, 1500 N. Lombardy St., Richmond, VA 23220.