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Priceless

Chesapeake Current

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“Parkway” Designated To Honor Brown

Notice new signs on MD Rt. 2 through Sunderland to the Anne Arundel County line? It's to honor Calvert County civil rights pioneer Harriet Elizabeth Brown, who fought for wage equality for educators back in the Depression era.

More than 100 people attended a ceremony marking the occasion on Nov. 1 at the Mt. Hope Community Center in Sunderland near the spot where the school stood where Brown taught and was a principal. The just over four and a half mile stretch of MD Rt. 2 now has new signs erected by the Maryland Highway Dept. designating it the Harriet Elizabeth Brown Memorial Parkway.

Brown became just the second African American Maryland woman to have a parkway named after her. The first was Harriet Tubman, an Underground Railroad leader that helped black slaves escape to freedom.



Miss Brown's former students.

Harriet Elizabeth Brown died in 2009 at age 101. She was a Calvert County school teacher who pushed for equal pay, regardless of race, in Maryland education. With the help of NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who was 29 at the time, Brown brought suit against the Calvert County Board of Education in 1937. At the time, black teachers were being paid almost of what their white counterparts with similar credentials were paid. Calvert County settled on December 27, 1937 and agreed to equalize pay. The Maryland Teachers Pay Equalization Law was passed, two years later.



One of the new road signs for MD Rt. 2 designated the Harriet Elizabeth Brown Memorial Parkway.

Margaret Dunkle, who headed the Calvert Commission for Women, was tasked with heading a commission to determine ways to honor Brown. The first recommendation was to name the new Prince Frederick Community Center on Dares Beach Road for Brown. This was the second recommendation, to name the stretch of Rt. 2 where the school stood where Brown taught in her honor. The third is to commission a painting of Brown to hang in the courthouse in



Margaret Dunkle, who chaired the Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Task Force.

Prince Frederick to commemorate the court victory. The painting will cost about \$10,000, and Donations of any amount are being accepted to pay for the portrait through a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization. Nancy Highsmith, who is president of the Calvert Community Foundation and an advisor to the Brown Commemorative Fund said at the event that already more than half of the money needed has been raised. Anyone who would like to contribute can send their tax-deductible donations to: Harriet Elizabeth Brown Commemoration Fund c/o Chesapeake Charities, 101 Log Canoe Circle, Suite O, Stevensville, MD 21666. Many in the crowd at the dedication ceremony were former students of hers, including Malcolm Funn, who said he was known as “little Malcolm” during that time. Although her family said she was always known as “Lizzy,” Funn said all the students only knew her as “Miss Brown.”



The oldest of Miss Brown's students at the ceremony, 91-year-old Helen Jones-Ray of Huntingtown.

Alphonso Hawkins, another of her students, remembered Miss Brown as a stern educator, who had strict rules and kept the kids in line. “She was the chief, we were her kids. And she knew it takes a village.” He added that he was thankful to have known her as a role model, and is proud of her legacy.

Another student, 91-year-old Helen Jones-Ray of Huntingtown says, “I will never forget that I was a little girl in her reading class – the three-room school. We were reading a story about a duck, and I remembered raising my hand and answering a question correctly when she asked and I was so proud that I knew the answer and she praised me for that!”

To help educate students in the future, Linda Buckley, who works at the Calvert Library in Prince Frederick, is writing a children's book about Miss Brown as well.