

Dr. Josie Johnson honored

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
Friday, 07 December 2012 11:46



A lifetime of commitment and service was captured in one day when the Minnesota Dept. of Human Rights honored Dr. Josie Johnson with its Humanitarian Award.

Johnson was honored Dec. 5 during an early-morning ceremony at the Minneapolis Urban League, 2100 Penn Ave. N. A room full of dignitaries and well-wishers were on hand to pay tribute to Johnson, a woman who has been at the forefront of civil and human rights for more than 50 years and was the first African-American to serve on the University of Minnesota's Board of Regents.

"I'm here to honor one of my heroes; a woman who has meant so much to this country in so many ways," said St. Paul Mayor, Chris Coleman. "She's always been willing to roll up her sleeves and do the work. And through it all she has maintained her dignity and grace."

Coleman said Johnson's appointment to the U of M's Board of Regents was symbolic of the progressive climate in the state. Johnson was named to the board in 1971 and served until 1973.

"She's (Johnson) one of the greatest human beings I know," said fellow civil rights luminary, Mahmoud El-Kati. "A person's chief aim in life is not to be happy, it's to be responsible, to be useful – to be compassionate. That's her (Johnson)."

Dist. 7 Metropolitan Council member, Gary Cunningham shared a very personal story involving Johnson. Cunningham said he was married earlier this year and Johnson, who recently achieved a divinity certificate, officiated the ceremony.

Cunningham also reflected upon the many instances of service in 82-year-old Johnson's life.

"In 1964 Josie led a multi-racial delegation of women to Jackson, Miss. To see the racism down there first hand," said Cunningham. "When you think about it, it takes a certain type of courage to go to Mississippi back then and do what she did. We owe a deep debt to Josie Johnson."

Dr. Josie Johnson honored

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
Friday, 07 December 2012 11:46

Cunningham said besides her courage, what stands out most about Johnson is her simple humanity.

"I've never ever seen her not stop and talk to someone. She has not ever, not treated someone with respect," said Cunningham.

The Metro Council member said Johnson is a go to person when a job needs doing.

"When the governor (Gov. Mark Dayton) got ready to select his cabinet, who did he go to, to co-chair his selection committee," questioned Cunningham. "He went to Josie Johnson. When I have a question, who do I go to? I go to Josie Johnson."

In her remarks to the overflow crowd at the Minneapolis Urban League, Johnson spoke first to the children in the room – many from Seed Academy.

"Young people, I'm so humbled to have you here," said Johnson. "You are the people who all of us have worked so hard for, and you are the future who will carry on this legacy. If you have anything, it's your responsibility to share it."

Johnson reflected back on her life in the civil rights movement.

"In 1956, Minnesota was still developing and it was beacon in the nation for justice," said Johnson. "We led the nation in the issues of social justice and human rights. In 1962 we passed a fair housing act before the national act. (At the time) we had a Republican governor who believed in justice for all. I maintain we need to return to that because we have drifted. We need to once again be the shining Northern Star."

Johnson was instrumental in the recent efforts to defeat the proposed voter ID amendment.

