



Desegregation

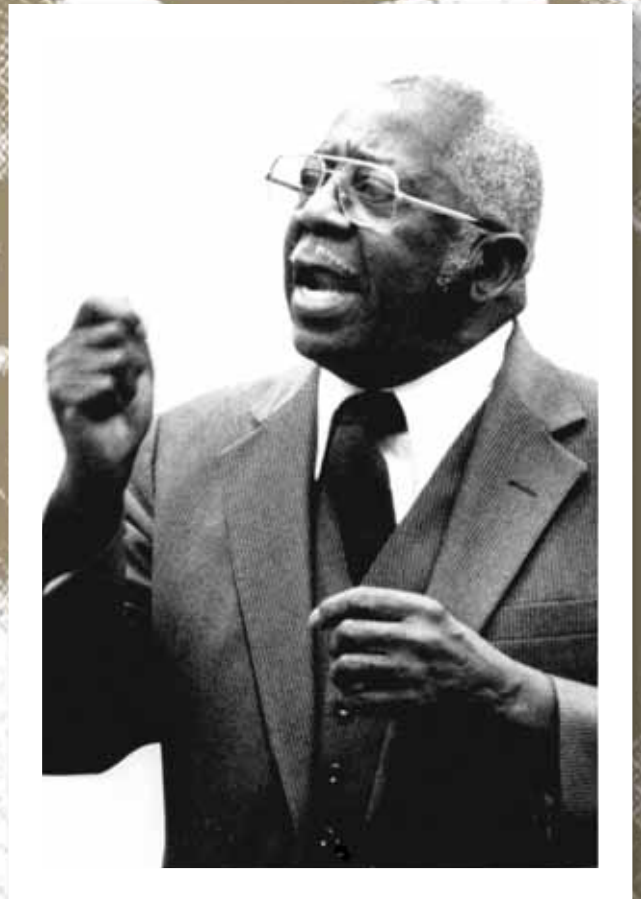
Pioneers Honored During
UF Constitution Day

BY SCOTT EMERSON & KATIE BLASEWITZ

Fifty years ago one man changed the course of history for higher education in the state of Florida. African American, academically eligible, and eager to start his instruction, Virgil Hawkins was denied admission to the University of Florida College of Law based solely on his race.

In 1949, Virgil D. Hawkins applied to the UF law school and was denied entry based on the color of his skin. With the legal assistance of future Associate Justice of the United States Thurgood Marshall, it took nine years, five Florida Supreme Court and four U.S. Supreme Court rulings before Hawkins broke the color barrier for students at UF — but at great personal cost. Hawkins abandoned his own aspirations to attend the College of Law by agreeing in 1958 to drop his suit against the state if Florida would desegregate university admissions.

On Sept. 15, 1958, George H. Starke Jr. enrolled in the UF College of Law, becoming the first black student to enter the university. In 1962, W. George Allen became the first black student to receive a degree from the UF College of Law. In 1965, the Honorable Stephan Mickle, United States District Judge in the Northern District of Florida, became the first black student to earn an undergraduate degree from the university.



Virgil D. Hawkins opened the doors at UF to enrollment of black students in 1958.

Hawkins went on to graduate from New England School of Law in 1964 and became a member of The Florida Bar in 1977. Because of his efforts to desegregate the state university system, more than 12,000 African-Americans have since earned degrees at the University of Florida.

“Virgil Hawkins and the other students of color who followed demonstrated remarkable personal courage and persistence,” said Robert Jerry, dean and Levin Mabie and Levin Professor of Law. “Today, UF has a more diverse student body, one that more closely matches the population of Florida and the nation.”

The 50th anniversary of desegregation was celebrated at UF on Sept. 15, and the civil rights pioneers responsible for changing the course of history for minority students were honored during the university’s Constitution Day Program hosted by the Levin College of Law on Sept. 17. The program featured a presentation by Harley Herman, Esq. (JD 78) of de Beaubien, Knight, Simmons, Mantzaris & Neal on the life and legacy of Virgil Hawkins.

“In reality, Virgil Hawkins never expected to be the Rosa Parks of Florida or his admission to the UF’s College of Law to be the Ft. Sumter of civil liberties,” said Herman, the attorney who laid the groundwork to recognize and honor Hawkins.

The program also included a panel discussion on the federal constitutional issues in law school desegregation with Kenneth Nunn, professor of law; Herman; Juan Perea, Cone Wagner Nugent Johnson, Hazouri and Roth Professor of Law; and Stephan P. Mickle, U.S. District Judge, U.S. District Court, Northern District of Florida.

George H. Starke Jr. addressed the audience during the program and said that even though he had never met Virgil Hawkins, he appreciates the sacrifice he made. “Virgil Hawkins made it possible for me to attend law school,” Starke said. “He made it all possible.”

Hawkins’ niece, Harriet Livingston, also addressed the audience, telling them that Hawkins’ faith provided him with patience and perseverance. “Only those who see the invisible can do the impossible,” said Livingston. “Virgil Hawkins taught us not to judge a person by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

At the close of the program Dean Robert Jerry reminded the audience to remember the heroic efforts of Virgil Hawkins, George H. Starke Jr., W. George Allen and Stephan Mickle. “As we leave today, we leave with the inspiration to do good and remember the struggle of those who came before us.”

W. George Allen (JD 63) enrolled in law school in September 1960, and became the first African-American law student to graduate from UF Law. UF Law has changed greatly in the years since Hawkins, Allen, Starke and Mickle attended. Allen said that the biggest change he’s seen in UF Law was “the proliferation of minority and women students.”

Allen is a former president of the National Bar Association, and he and wife, Enid, are major contributors to the UF Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations. Allen serves as a member of the UF Foundation Board of Directors, and the college’s Black Law Student Association is named in his honor.

“When I started there I was the only black and there were only two women. Now the class is more diverse and it represents society — but I started in 1960,” said Allen. “Now, the law school is more in tune to the population. The diversity has been good for the school.” ■

GEORGE H. STARKE JR.

In his own words

No one will ever know how much it meant to me to participate in the Constitution Day Program, and to have the opportunity to tell the story of some of my experiences at the law school and at UF in the first days... These experiences were unique.

I mentioned to someone earlier that while I would have come to school at UF in any event once the laws changed, I have long thought it would have been better for me as an individual just to have had the normal struggles to contend with... UF had a 105-year history of segregation when I first came, and I have to think on reflection that was more difficult to cope with than I anticipated — not because of the few threats, but because of the intangibles and subtleties.

I tried to conduct myself as simply another student, and tried to block out all thoughts about the historical implications of my being there. I



NO DISORDER REPORTED

Negro enrolls in UF law school

By WHITEY McMULLEN
Staff Writer
George H. Starke, a 27-year-old
Orlando Negro, today registered
in the University of Florida Law
College.

There were no incidents as
Starke, along with approximately
100 other freshmen law students,
went through the nearly two-hour
long registration process.

Jones High School for Negroes at
Orlando.
"Mother's Comment
"I only want him to do well."
his mother commented upon hear-
ing that her son had enrolled.

plans to practice in Florida wi-
th he graduates.
He answered every question
sly and only balked on giv-
ing his mother's age. "She might



George H. Starke, seated, the first Negro registration packet from assistant Regi-

By HARRY S. RAPE
Gator Editorial Assistant
(Copyright 1960, The Florida Alligator)

The first Negro UF student, George H. Starke Jr., came, stayed three semesters and is gone.

Reaction to his year and half on the UF campus has varied from acceptance (in some cases with clenched teeth) to complete (but usually silent) rejection.

No crosses were burned, no one shouted "nigger" and no one threatened Starke during his three semesters of study.

Predicted No Violence
University officials predicted before Starke's registration: "There will be no violence, disruption or incident" such as plagued the University of Alabama when it admitted Negro Autherine Lucy in 1955.

There was none.
Details concerning Starke's stay here are not readily available. However, through exclusive interviews with the Negro law student, his law professors, fellow students and University administrative officials the following story unfolded.



STARKE

Early newspaper accounts of George H. Starke Jr.'s first day at the UF College of Law on Sept. 15, 1958, and his eventual departure after three semesters.

FAST FACTS

- 1946-1958: 85 black students apply to the University of Florida and are denied admission.
- 1949: Virgil Hawkins and William T. Lewis are denied admission to UF College of Law.
- 1954: *Brown v. Board of Education* decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. In a companion decision, the court orders the University of Florida to admit Virgil Hawkins. The state resists the ruling. Virgil Hawkins brings his case before the Florida Supreme Court five times and the U.S. Supreme Court four times.
- 1957: Florida Supreme Court upholds Virgil Hawkins' denial of admission. Justice Stephen O'Connell, who later served as UF's president, concurs in the decision.
- 1958: Hawkins withdraws his application to the UF College of Law in exchange for the desegregation of UF graduate and professional schools.
- 1958: George H. Starke is the first African-American to be admitted to UF's College of Law.
- 1959: College of Law celebrates 50th anniversary.
- 1962: W. George Allen is the first African-American to receive a degree from the UF College of Law.
- 1965: Stephan Mickle is the first African-American to earn an undergraduate degree from UF, later earning his law degree from UF in 1970.
- Today: In fall 2007, 51,725 students were enrolled at the University of Florida, including approximately 4,300 African-Americans, 6,000 Hispanics and 3,800 Asians.
- Today: 2008 Levin College of Law minority representation: 25.4 percent. This includes Asian, 8.56 percent; African-American, 5.79 percent; Hispanic 10.57 percent; and Native American 0.5 percent.

wanted to be treated just like everyone else, and... I think in the main I was, although I cannot be 100 percent certain. Fred Levin and others in my class would know more about that than I, since they also know whether anything changed in how they were treated following our third semester.

My plan (upon leaving law school after the third semester) had been to reapply in about five years or so, but it took longer than that to get the negative experiences out of my system, and even longer to get to a point where I could even talk about it... Five years became 10, and 10 became 20, and life intervened. So, I did not reapply or decide to go elsewhere.

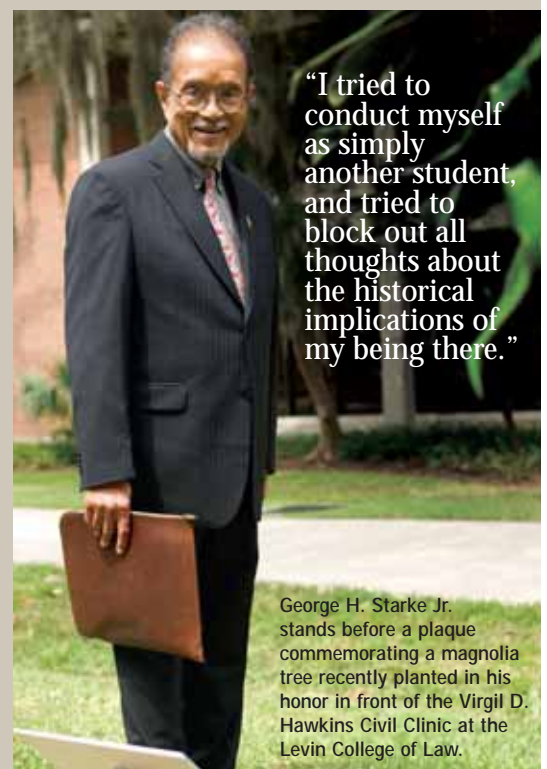
I participated on a panel (during the Constitution Day activities at UF), with one person from each of the decades from the 50s through the 90s. It was very interesting to note how matters emerged and evolved at UF over time, with changes in both culture and leadership at institutional and community levels. I think Governor [Leroy] Collins and Dr. [John W.] Reitz

set a tone for UF and the state — before and after I was there, which contributed for a long time to the climate and general atmosphere in which minority students, and all others, were able to grow, to organize, to express themselves and to work for what they wanted the University of Florida to become. I was on the Alumni Board of Directors a few years, and had the opportunity to vote to establish the Association of Black Alumni. I know there now to be any number of such organizations on the various campuses.

Finally, thank you again for the invitation and the opportunity to participate in the Levin College of Law Constitution Day Program.... I am glad I had an opportunity to learn more about the life and times of Mr. Hawkins. I knew bits and pieces but was impressed with his story.

I appreciate his call now more than ever.

—George H. Starke
Excerpted from correspondence to Dean Robert Jerry dated Sept. 25, 2008



"I tried to conduct myself as simply another student, and tried to block out all thoughts about the historical implications of my being there."

George H. Starke Jr. stands before a plaque commemorating a magnolia tree recently planted in his honor in front of the Virgil D. Hawkins Civil Clinic at the Levin College of Law.