

## **Riviera Beach**

The first ever Hastings' Hero is Judge Edward Rodgers of Riviera Beach.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Edward Rodgers moved to West Palm Beach, Florida in 1950 after he met and married Palm Beach County native Gwendolyn Baker.

Although he studied political science as an undergraduate student, Judge Rodgers became a teacher, schooling soldiers at segregated Roosevelt High School before being promoted to assistant principal. Disturbed by the bureaucratic tyranny of teaching in the segregated South, Rodgers set his sight on becoming an attorney.

Judge Rodgers attended Florida A&M University Law School and, along with Congressman Hastings, was one in a six-person class to graduate in 1963. Within two short years, Rodgers was appointed the first black county prosecutor in Palm Beach County and then the first black judge. There, he would serve in civil, criminal, and probate courts before retiring in 1995 after 22 remarkable years on the bench.

Judge Rodgers' accomplishments are many. However, some of his career highlights include helping former Governor of Florida Lawton Chiles investigate allegations that the Palm Beach County's Judicial Nominating Commission made back-room judicial appointments; establishing a Saturday drug court in Riviera Beach, West Palm Beach, and Delray Beach to champion the rights of the mentally ill and drug addicted; establishing the Gwen Bakers Rodgers Memorial Fund to honor his late wife; serving as Assistant State Attorney; and working as a mediator and a court-appointed special master in arbitration cases.

When he retired in 1995, Judge Rodgers pledged to continue to work to restore his town. In fact on his first run for office in 1999, Rodgers won a seat on the Riviera Beach city council.

In recognition of his longstanding commitment to South Florida, Congressman Hastings introduced legislation in the 108th Congress renaming the Riviera Beach post office after Judge Rodgers (PL 108-112). On November 11, 2003, the Congressman Hastings' legislation was signed into law, and a formal naming ceremony has been scheduled for Spring 2004.

Judge Rodgers is a man that is known for his compassion, fairness, and strength. He is man that is respected and loved by his peers and within his community. It is an honor to recognize this tireless commitment and name Judge Edward Rodgers a Hastings' Hero.

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