



OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER CHRISTOPHER WARD THIRD COUNCIL DISTRICT

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COUNCILMEMBER WARD DEDICATES LEON WILLIAMS DRIVE IN GOLDEN HILL

SAN DIEGO, CA – (Friday, October 20, 2017) – San Diego Councilmember Chris Ward (District Three) joined civic leaders and community members in Golden Hill today for the official dedication of Leon Williams Drive. Mr. Williams became the first African-American to serve on the San Diego City Council in 1969, as well as the first, and so far only, African-American on the San Diego County Board of Supervisors in 1982. The honorary sign designating the 3000 block of E Street recognizing the social justice trailblazer was unveiled in a ceremony Friday afternoon.

"Now more than ever, it's so important that we honor those individuals that bring diverse communities together, and I can think of no one more deserving than Leon Williams," said Councilmember Ward. "It is so special for me to have the opportunity to honor a true champion for justice and civic legend with the first honorary street naming of my City Council term."

Leon Williams moved to California from the Oklahoma dustbowl as a child, and served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during World War Two. He was among the first African-American students to enroll at San Diego State College (Now San Diego State University), and in 1947, he purchased his home on E Street in Golden Hill, becoming the first African-American in the white-only community even when the deed explicitly required a white owner.

"Leon is a rare public servant, having served for 37 years in office and advocated for solutions to difficult problems well ahead of his time," said State Senator Toni Atkins. "From championing needle-exchange programs to fight AIDS, to leading on smart growth and smarter transit solutions, he has always been a true champion for the common person."

During the 37 years in civic life, Mr. Williams spurred the dynamic downtown renewal. His achievements include the fixed-rail trolley to San Diego State University and overall better transit options, the installation of freeway call boxes to help drivers stranded in a pre-cellphone world.

“Leon Williams made history as the first African American elected to public office in San Diego. And for that alone he deserves recognition of having permanent landmarks named after him,” Assemblywoman Dr. Shirley Weber said. “However, the real honor is in the unquestionable quality of service, leadership and mentorship he has provided to all of San Diego. He is truly a statesman, and his unselfish leadership and contributions will benefit generations to come. I am honored to call him a friend and a mentor.”

Williams also led the creation of San Diego’s Office of the Public Defender and tougher smoking regulations. He was an early advocate of programs to combat AIDS and also pushed for robust community-oriented policing.

“Leon Williams has been a pioneer, a leader and an inspiration for all of San Diego,” said Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher. “He’s had a larger-than-life impact on so much of our civic life. Naming a block of E Street after Leon is a fitting tribute, given the permanent imprint he’s left on this city.”

San Diego Municipal Code Section 125.1130 allows the City Council to recognize the significant contributions by or importance of certain individuals and organizations to the City of San Diego by naming sections of public streets in their honor. Recognition with an honorary street title is reserved for those that have performed an exemplary act or achievement of lasting interest to their community, which reflects positively on the City of San Diego as a whole.

“Of the many, many public officials I have worked with over the years, Leon Williams stands out as a mentor and role model,” Supervisor Ron Roberts said. “He is one of the most gentlemanly figures I’ve encountered and his work on public transportation alone, from light rail to clean fuel buses, is an accomplishment that will benefit generations of San Diegans. I’m proud to have Leon Williams Drive in the Fourth Supervisorial District that we both have had the honor to serve.”

Mr. Williams and members of his family returned to City Hall October 10, when the San Diego City Council voted unanimously to approve the honorary designation following personal stories and glowing comments from current councilmembers.

“Leon Williams is a historic figure with great contributions to the economic growth and quality of life of San Diego,” said Council President Myrtle Cole. “It’s such a pleasure to be able to join Mr. Williams, his family, colleagues and loved ones at his honorary street designation.”

The honorary renaming policy was adopted in December of 2016, and does not change or affect official street names or addresses. Since adoption, streets have been named in honor of Kathleen Harmon, Mark Hamill, and Walter Munk.

For more information or to interview Councilmember Ward, contact Lucas O'Connor at (619) 236-6633 or (619) 368-3153.

Councilmember Ward represents San Diego’s Third Council District including the communities of Downtown, Little Italy, Bankers Hill, Mission Hills, Middletown, Hillcrest, University Heights, North Park, Normal Heights, Old Town, South Park, and Golden Hill.

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