

# Pioneer Delaware corrections officer leaves legacy

## Webb first black male warden in state

By ESTEBAN PARRA • The News Journal • February 22, 2010

John L. Webb broke a Delaware color barrier in 1954 when he became the state's first black correctional officer.

Webb, a native Delawarean, rose quickly through the ranks to become the state's first black male warden.

"Although circumstances made Warden Webb the first African-American correctional officer, his leadership and dedication made him a much more important figure within the department," Delaware Department of Correction Commissioner Carl C. Danberg said. "Without a doubt, his groundbreaking accomplishments continue to have relevance today."

Webb died Feb. 12. He was 77. His funeral services are Tuesday. He is survived by his children.

Although Webb retired from the Department of Correction nearly 20 years ago, he is still remembered by those he took the time to meet and those he helped.

"He didn't see color, he was interested in turning out the best correctional staff that he could," said Ronald Sauls, who first met Webb when he had to replace guards who were taking time off for training. Sauls is a training administrator at the prison system's academy and president of the Delaware chapter of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice. "He actually took the time to talk to me and sit down and want to know how I got to the department, and what were my goals and plans."

Despite beginning his career in a segregated profession, Webb told The News Journal in 1990 he encountered racial resentment only occasionally when he started at Greenbank Prison near Prices Corner, originally operated by New Castle County.

After Delaware formed a consolidated statewide prison system, Webb transferred to Vaughn Correctional Center near Smyrna in 1975.

Three years later, Webb returned to Prices Corner. This time, it was to be the officer in charge of the Pre-Trial Annex. He would later become warden.

The building was later renamed the John L. Webb Correctional Facility.

"He was proud for the building to be honored after him," said Betty Webb, John Webb's younger sister. "My brother was the kind of person who didn't really show his true emotions, but I know he was very proud and very honored."

After Webb was hired, it took another five years before another black officer was employed at the department. Today, nearly 40 percent of the department's 1,600 officers are minorities.

Although she considers her brother a trailblazer and pioneer who helped mark a path for other minorities wanting to enter jobs that had traditionally been open only to whites, Betty Webb said her brother was likely looking for a job, not looking to become a symbol.

According to the newspaper interview Webb gave shortly after he retired, she may be right.

"I didn't think of it as having anything to do with being black," Webb said. "I just thought of it as a personal accomplishment. I don't want to downplay

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