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GWEN T. JACKSON

1928-2019

City: Milwaukee

County: Milwaukee

Gwen T. Jackson dedicated her life to serving others and volunteered for the American Red Cross for more than half a century.

Gwen T. Jackson was born on May 28, 1928, and grew up on Milwaukee's north side. She attended Lincoln High School in Milwaukee and, while still a young woman, started working as a clerk at Brill's Colony clothing store. She stayed with Brill's Colony for 31 years, working her way up to become the vice president of human resources. Jackson's community service career began in the late 1950s when she served on the Family Life Committee for the Milwaukee Urban League. In 1961 she began volunteering for the American Red Cross, in the Service to Military Families Department of the Greater Milwaukee chapter. That was just the beginning of her long and full career with the Red Cross.

Jackson became chair (person in charge) of interviewing and placement for the Greater Milwaukee chapter of the Red Cross in 1979, and by 1981 she was chair of the whole chapter, a position she held until 1984. After that she was named chair emeritus, which meant she got to keep the title as an honor, even though she no longer actively held the job, for the rest of her life. In 1988, Jackson became the National Chair of Volunteers for the American Red Cross, one of the highest volunteer positions in the organization. She was the first Black person ever to serve in that role.

Much of Jackson's long career of volunteer work focused on helping communities in the Milwaukee area, but her efforts went much farther: she worked to support those affected by the Persian Gulf War, by Hurricane Hugo, and by famine in Africa. Jackson also volunteered for several other organizations in her community, including the Milwaukee County Department of Aging, the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County, the Milwaukee Urban League, and the YWCA.

Jackson worked hard to improve the lives of children in Milwaukee. She was chair of the Child Care Advisory Committee, which helped parents with limited incomes afford childcare, until the late 1990s. In 2000 she took on the task of forming the Early Childhood Council of Milwaukee. She was the Council's first chair and stayed on as a member until the Council was ended. She was later appointed to the State Child Care Council. In honor of her commitment to helping the children of Milwaukee, the 21st Street School was renamed in 2009 as the Gwen T. Jackson Early Childhood and Elementary School.

Jackson was widely recognized through the years for her dedication to the Red Cross and to her community. The United Way established the Gwen T. Jackson Community Service award in 1981, and in 1995 a building in the YWCA Y-Village was named the Gwen T. Jackson Senior Building. The American Red Cross honored her 50 years of service in 2003 with its Cynthia Wedel Award and, in 2007, created the Gwen T. Jackson Leadership Endowment in her honor.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/gwen-t-jackson