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‘Spiritual mother,’ longest-serving Chicago Housing Authority commissioner honored with senior apartment building dedication

Commissioner Mildred C. Harris was celebrated Wednesday with the unveiling of a recently-rehabbed senior apartment building in the Woodlawn neighborhood that will carry her name.
By [Mariah Rush](#)

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*Chicago Housing Authority Commissioner Mildred Harris stands before a sign Wednesday at a newly rehabbed senior apartment building at 6360 S. Minerva Ave. in Woodlawn that will carry her name.
Pat Nabong/Sun-Times*

The Chicago Housing Authority’s long-serving commissioner, Mildred Harris, has hundreds of children, though only some are her flesh and blood, her supporters said Wednesday.

Others were taught by her in kindergarten and still more consider Harris, a community pastor, to be their “spiritual mother.”

“I think she sees us all as her children,” Tracey Scott, the housing authority’s CEO, said Wednesday at the dedication of a newly rehabbed senior apartment building at 6360 S. Minerva Ave. that will carry Harris’ name.

“She’s been not just a fixture in this community, but a promoter, a mentor and coach to so many,” Scott said. “This is just a small way to honor her.”

Dozens of CHA leaders, pastors and elected officials spoke of Harris’ character, dedication to serving her community and generosity to every age group.

Scott said there was “no hesitation” over the decision to name the building for Harris.



Chicago Housing Authority Commissioner Mildred Harris reacts to seeing a sign with her name on it during the dedication ceremony for the newly rehabbed and renamed Dr. Mildred C. Harris Apartments in the Woodlawn neighborhood.

Pat Nabong/Sun-Times

Harris was appointed to the housing authority’s board in 1999 by Mayor Richard M. Daley but had already served the agency for years in various volunteer roles.

The founder and CEO of God First Ministries, Harris holds three master’s degrees, as well as a doctorate in ministry, and is considered one of the city’s foremost pastoral leaders, CHA Chairperson Angela Hurlock said of her mentor’s many accomplishments.

“Dr. Harris is the embodiment of helping people believe beyond what they think they can do to actually utilize the gifts that God has given them,” Hurlock said. “She sees what you don’t see and then helps you believe that you can get there, and then helps you get there.”

To celebrate Harris’ achievements and her newly dedicated building, Mayor Lori Lightfoot declared June 29 as Dr. Mildred C. Harris day in the city.

Cheers and horns erupted in the crowd, as Harris herself took to the podium.

“I just want to give glory to God and to my parents,” Harris said. “I was an only child, but they instilled in me the belief that I was supposed to serve people. I just want to say that I’m really speechless.”

Mariah Rush is a staff reporter at the Chicago Sun-Times via [Report for America](#), a not-for-profit journalism program that aims to bolster the paper’s coverage of communities on the South and West sides.