Another recent memorable day for Judge Burke, came when the President of The Ohio State University Gordan Gee made a visit to her home to hand deliver her a new degree to replace the original that was stolen years ago.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

Black women Judges from the greater Cleveland and surrounding area's all came together to visit retired Judge Lillian Burke at her house recently.
She was the first African American woman to sit on the bench in the State of Ohio with her appointment to the Cleveland Municipal Court in January
1969

. She was later elected to that office in November 1969. She served until her retirement in1987.

Burke also was the first woman ever elected to serve as an Administrative Judge of a Municipal Court in Ohio. Judge Shirley Saffold suggested bringing the female judges together to salute Judge Burke. Judge Safford served in Burke's chair when she retired in 1987. Judge Burke swore-in Judge Saffold and gave her great words that have inspired her to this day.

Judges Saffold, Patricia Blackmon, and C Ellen Connally decided to gather all the judges together and doing something special for her. "I am most appreciative to Judge Burke; because she has never forgotten to look back try to bring us forward. Without her I would have not been a Judge today," said Saffold.

Tagged as Burke's "daughters in the law," they proclaimed they are the heirs and beneficiaries of her legacy. Thanking her for paving the way they wanted to unite and show her how much she meant to them.

In 1969 Judge Burke was the lone Black woman in all of Ohio's judiciary. Now Black women serve on every court in the State including the first Black woman on the Ohio Supreme Court with the appointment of Yvette McGee Brown.

Black women currently serve on the United States District Court, the United States Bankruptcy Court, the Court of Appeals, the Common Pleas Court and various municipal courts, all due to the legacy of Judge Lillian Burke.

Judge Burke was so excited being around all of her daughters in the law. "I have a great love for all these woman who came out to be with me. I love them all, we have some beautiful Judges on the bench," said Judge Burke.

Judge Burke shared with the Call & Post how after the appointment she had to run against the Corrigan name and against a city that had 90 percent democrats at the time. "I worked hard to get elected, I went to almost every church," she said.

In the midst of the celebration walked in two good friends, retired Judges Lillian Greene and Sara J. Harper. Sitting around laughing , Burke and Harper started talking about their long friendship from the days of when they teamed up to sue Mayor Ralph Perk for taking 10 percent of their money.

The lone two Black Republican women Judges took on the city of Cleveland who at that time was crying broke. They shared how they hired John Bustamante as their lawyer and won to get all their money back.

“I have appreciate my friendship with Judge Burke for all these years, she is truly a great inspiration to us all,” said retired Judge Sara J. Harper. Gladys V. Hall was Judge Burke’s Administrative Assistant and was also appointed the first Black female deputy bailiff of Cleveland Municipal Court in 1974. Gladys is still working by Burke’s side everyday as her caregiver.

Burke was born in 1917 , and grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania . After graduating from high school, Burke attended Ohio State University, where she received her bachelor's of science degree in education in 1947 . In 1951 , she received her law degree from the Cleveland Marshall College of Law, now part of Cleveland State University, and was admitted to the Ohio Bar.

While pursuing her law degree, Burke worked as a teacher in the Cleveland Public Schools. After graduating from law school, she served three years as the assistant attorney general , specializing in workmen's compensation. She was later appointed to the Ohio Industrial Commission by Governor James Rhodes, and served in that capacity for three years.

Judge Burke worked with a number of community organizations and voluntary associations, including The Cleveland Restoration Society, the City Planning Commission and Landmark Commission, The Cleveland Foundation African American Outreach Advisory Committee, National Council of Negro Women, the City Club, the NAACP , and Alpha Kappa Alpha

Sorority. She has also established the Lillian Walker Burke Scholarship for students attending the John Marshall College of Law.

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Judge Burke's son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Burke were on hand for both special honors to their mother.