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By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

The Forest City Tennis Club (FCTC) celebrated its 100th anniversary on Sunday with the renaming of its home courts after its oldest living member, retired Judge Jean Murrell Capers.

Capers, 99, may be better known as a former Cleveland Municipal Court judge and the first Black woman elected to the Cleveland City Council, but she also was a citywide tennis champion back in the ‘50s.

Capers joined the Forest City Tennis Club in 1935. It's believed to be the oldest Black tennis club in the country, started in 1912 by a group of professional men. One of them being Capers' father, a printer named Edward E. Murrell. They originally played behind St. John AME Church at East 40th Street and Central Avenue.

Cleveland City Councilman Jeff Johnson served as the Master of Ceremony for the afternoon. Rev. Richard Gibson gave the invocation before Rev. Dr. Taylor Thompson of St. John A.M.E. gave a historical perspective.

Brief comments about Judge Capers and FCTC came from Mayor Frank Jackson, Councilwoman Phyllis Cleveland, State Rep. Bill Patmon, University Circle President Chris Ronayne.

The courts will be known as the Judge Jean Murrell Capers Tennis Courts atRockefellerPark, according to a proclamation read by Mayor Frank Jackson. The driveway leading up to the court was renamedForest City Club Drive.

Jeff Johnson along with other Council members presented Judge Capers with the sign before she gave remarks. “My father moved us toClevelandin 1919 and I was educated at the greatest High School aroundCentralHigh School,” said Capers.

The retired Judge went on to say they had to be educated because our parents believed in education. “I was always a teacher at heart because my parents were the best,” Capers said.

FCTC President Kevin Strickland in his remarks thanked everyone who helped make this possible for both the Tennis Club and Judge Capers.

“Judge Jean Murrell Capers, 99 year-old Cleveland pioneer, is very deserving of this honor” says Strickland. “Not only was she the first Black woman elected to city council of any major U.S. city, served as Assistant Attorney General, received a Cleveland-Marshall College of Law honorary doctorate of laws degree and is the oldest living retired Judge in Ohio; in her spare time, she was a city wide tennis champion and is the oldest living member of the FCTC. It is

only fitting that her legacy live on at the Rockefeller Park Tennis Courts," he added.

Memorial Day weekend is a fitting time for the renaming ceremony as it coincides with the club's annual Forest City Open, a United States Tennis Association-sanctioned tournament.

Councilman Jeff Johnson also noted that each prior Council person helped in some kind of way keeping the Tennis Courts viable for the community. Everything from the lights to the newly resurfacing of the courts.

Special acknowledgements was also given to Bob Render, a member of FCTC who has been a community leader for years. Render went campaigning to various officials soliciting their help in making the renaming happen.

FCTC has played at Rockefeller Park Tennis Courts for the past 60 years. It has been home to notable tennis players such as Leslie Allen, who was the second African-American Woman to win a major tennis tournament; Carlos Fleming, who currently represents Venus and Serena Williams as VP of Tennis at IMG and our very own Judge Jean Murrell Capers, who joined FCTC in 1935.

Councilman Jeffrey Johnson stated "We are extremely proud of the accomplishments of FCTC. FCTC and the Rockefeller Park Tennis Courts are filled with history. There will be tennis players and members of the greaterClevelandarea and beyond on hand as the tennis court is designated a Historical Landmark."