



City of Chicago



O2023-1582

Office of the City Clerk

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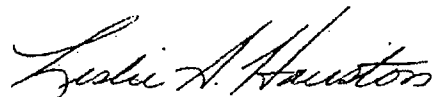
Meeting Date:	4/19/2023
Sponsor(s):	Hairston (5)
Type:	Ordinance
Title:	Honorary street designation as "Rev Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr. Way"
Committee(s) Assignment:	Committee on Transportation and Public Way

Committee on Transportation & Public Way
City Council Meeting
April 19, 2023

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY of CHICAGO:

SECTION 1. Pursuant to an ordinance heretofore passed by the City Council which allows erection of honorary street name signs, the Commissioner of Transportation shall take the necessary action for standardization of E. 63rd St.; between S. Stony Island Ave. and to S. Blackstone Ave. "Rev. Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr. Way"

SECTION 2. This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and publication.



Leslie A. Hairston
Alderman, Fifth Ward

Date:

Office of Budget and Management
121 N. LaSalle, Room 604
Chicago, IL 60602

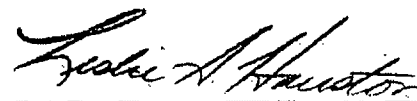
To Whom It May Concern:

I, Leslie A. Hairston, Alderman of the 5th Ward, hereby authorize the Office of Budget Management to withdraw the funds associated with the cost of installation for this honorary street designation for Rev. Dr. Leon D. Finney, Jr. Way from my:

- Ward's annual menu program budget
- Ward's aldermanic expense allowance

upon passage of this designation ordinance, pursuant to Section 2-8-040 of the Chicago Municipal Code.

Sincerely,



Leslie A. Hairston
Alderman

Dr. Leon Finney Jr. 1938 –

2020

by Dr. Hermene Hartman



Dr. Leon Finney Jr. was a dear friend. I first met him as a college student, working with Reverends Jesse Jackson and Willie Barrow at Operation Breadbasket, now known as Rainbow PUSH. My ex husband, David Wallace, and I would deliver press releases to him on Saturdays when he was the publisher of The Woodlawn Observer. He was a mentor, a teacher and throughout the years, we became fast

friends. We experienced life in its multiple variations, – marriage, divorce, illness and even death.

Leon was a Renaissance man – dashing, handsome and dapper at all times. Even when he was most casual, he was pressed down sharp with his bucks and bow ties. He fought the good fight with boundless energy. He was about the business of empowerment, power and business. He was a stalwart of the Black community, he was the go to guy. He wore many hats – entrepreneur, community organizer, real estate developer and civic leader.

Leon was a strategic fighter, trained and mentored by the late ****Saul Alinsky****, ****Bishop Arthur Brazier**** and ****Bill Barry****. He was the guy you wanted with you in the back room. He was focused and a hard worker from sun up to sun down. He was resourceful; he was connected to city hall and to the state house. There were countless politicians black and white, local and national that he embraced. While working their campaigns, he made a difference and perhaps helped them win. He had clout and he used it well.

Leon was a former United States Marine. I don't know what position he served while in the Marines, but I suspect it was drill sergeant. He exercised discipline, razor-sharp focus, was goal orientated and yielded results, like a real soldier. Often overbearing when trying to get things done, he always succeeded and always performed his best.

Leon could spot talent and he enjoyed working with young people. He loved to mold and train their sharp minds. He had been such a student and he paid it forward when he could. Leon also liked working with women. He said they had a sixth sense and saw things men did not. He was respectful of a woman's perspective and often asked for it. He might have disagreed, but he valued the viewpoint.

The Wonders of Campaigning

During the mayoral campaign of Harold Washington, Leon was with Jane Byrne. He was loyal. Professor Bob Starks chaired the task force for Black political empowerment and single handedly forced Leon to join the Washington campaign. It was a big fight that Bob eventually won. When Finney saw the overwhelming support for Washington, he quickly got on board and began to organize. The reason Finney opposed Harold was business. He had vested interest in the Taste

of Chicago, that the Black community was boycotting with his father's Leon's Barbeque. He was going to lose significant dollars with the boycott.

Leon argued a lot. He would make his point and challenge you to do the same. Sometimes you agreed and often you didn't. He enjoyed a good political campaign. He made a difference in the Carol Mosley Braun campaign. He convinced everyone that she could win. He went into organizing mode on her behalf from fundraising to precinct work and produced a historic win with Black women in the forefront.

He was the Illinois Field Director for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. While in the office discussing fundraising during Jesse's campaign, we were very concerned about funding and Leon was fussing about the mail being unanswered. Leon said, "Hermene open up those bags and let's answer the mail." I began to open the mail and we found more than \$6 million dollars from all over the country in small bills. We were receiving contributions from churches, ladies clubs, students, and Black organizations in small denominations. Leon and I stayed up all night and opened every single envelope. The funding we were looking for, was right in front of our eyes. We were certain to open the bags of mail daily going forward. I got a new job for a while.

Leon worked tirelessly for the Barack Obama presidential campaign in Indiana. He was determined that the busload of people he took to Indiana with a Chicago brand of politics could deliver Indiana. He was right. Out of all the hard work that he did for Obama, he was never invited to the White House.

In most campaigns I was with the Finney brand, but not all. The 2019 mayoral campaign between Lori Lightfoot and Toni Preckwinkle, Leon and I had a good fight. I was with the Lightfoot camp and he was with Preckwinkle's. He could not convince me to be with Toni, because she was so experienced, prepared and ready to assume the fifth floor. He called me every morning to discuss and fuss. We debated, argued, cussed and slam phones down. I told him "Leon you will lose this one, because you are running a poor campaign and your old tactics are dated and you won't win." He persuaded the who's who of Black Chicago to his way.

I argued and argued to no avail, but I stood my Lightfoot ground. He had others call me to discuss Preckwinkle and I wouldn't back down. The business organization, Black Leadership Council, of which Leon was apart, would not meet with candidate Lightfoot. I called several times for a candidate meeting and Lori called them six times. The meeting was not granted, and Leon and I argued fiercely on how unfair that was.

He fought the University of Chicago from taking over Woodlawn and he also fought the gangs.

He was strategic and for the most part he won. He was the mayor of Woodlawn, no matter who was the mayor downtown. He helped to build the organization, The Woodlawn Organization, TWO. He invited many to join him. He knew how to mobilize. He knew when to demonstrate and when to march. He knew how to persuade and how to convince. He played the power game to the hilt.

In his last year of life, we had very long talks, mostly at his hospital bedside. I was his little sister and he was still telling me what to do and how to do it. I was encouraging him to write a book with guidelines to community organization. Many talk it, but few are doing it. He was a real live activist. I told Leon to use Woodlawn as a case study but give the do's and don'ts and the lessons on how to do it. I got him a book deal. We talked about a podcast, that we would call "The Woodlawn Way." He got the outline complete for it's first few chapters. I don't know how much he wrote. We talked about doing a Facebook master class on community organizing. That was the last project we were working on, until he became too ill to continue.

Leon Finney Jr., was a Chicago treasure. He made Chicago a better place. He was an essential worker. He also had his share of battles. When most Black leaders fight for social change or get too much power, money, or property, the white media are on them like wild attack dogs. The media was unmerciful and mean spirited to Leon. He brought forth a PR team to fight back. The team was Marilyn Katz, Jerry Thomas and myself. He was threatened but his team fought a brave and good fight. He was concerned that his good deeds would be overshadowed by accusation of wrong doings.

The case is now over. Leon died at 82 years, having lived a good responsible life. He lived life on his own terms and he did it his way. There was no doubt that he helped many. He used his voice for good. He created his power. He had multiple careers, and excelled in all of them. His wonderful daughter, Kristin Finney -Cooke and his three grandchildren and three sisters and brother, survive him. He will be remembered with Finney tales, with words of wisdom and most of all with love by friend and foe. If you were even in a fight with Leon, you learned lessons and you will remember the dispute.

The day after the election, I called him early morning to say, Lightfoot won every ward. I called that afternoon to say Lightfoot won every single ward. I called that evening to say "call me when you would like to talk about winning." I called him every four hours with a smart comment to say I told you so. He would not take my calls.

The next morning he called to ask what happened. I said, it's simple; it's a lesson I learned from you a long time ago. Elections are bottom up not top down. You were not listening to the ground swell. You were not listening to the women. You missed it and your smart-ass crew missed it too. We analyzed the election for days. He was angry and hurt to be wrong. He loved politics but most all he loved being right. His student beat him at his very own game. Many times after we had a good go at it, he would call to say, how about dinner tonight? My answer was only if I could pick the restaurant. Every dinner entailed another battle that always ended well.

Leon The Minister.

Finney was quite the guy. When he became career restless, he went to Bishop Brazier seeking counsel. He wanted to go back to school to become a minister or a lawyer. Brazier convinced him that he could do much more from the pulpit. When the historic Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church was threatening foreclosure, he stepped up with passion. He recognized the historical value of the church built in 1890. It was one of the places, where A. Phillip Randolph organized the Pullman Porters. It's the place where the likes of Marian Anderson and Paul Roberson performed when they couldn't go downtown, because of segregation. It's the church where Eleanor Roosevelt and Thurgood Marshall visited. He went on a crusade to save and rebuild the church and he did. He made the church stand for something; it became a community-gathering place in addition to Sunday church services.

Leon went back to school, receiving a double masters degree in Economic and Urban Community Development and a double doctorate degree in Theology and Public Administration. He became a professor and joined the staff of McCormick Theological Seminary as a professor of African American Leadership Studies. This effort brought forth degrees for about 300 ministers under his tutelage. Leon was a proud member of the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

Leon was perhaps one of the best community organizers in the country. He was resourceful and he knew the hot buttons. He was a powerhouse. He fought for housing and for political control in his community - the Woodlawn community.

Reverend Dr. Leon Dorsey Finney Jr.

Activist. Family Man. Civic Leader. Pastor. Mentor.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling

It was the late 1960's, morning traffic is backed up to a standstill for miles as the Dan Ryan grinds to a halt and all one hears is a loud bull horn with a man shouting, "WE DEMAND Equal Opportunities For City Jobs and Contracts... No one goes to work until we all have the same opportunities! Mayor Daley...What Say You?! Labor Unions... What Say You?!"

A Fighter for Rights, A Fighter for Equality, A Fighter for Equal Opportunities; A Fighter for Fair Housing; A Fighter for Black and Brown People! A Fighter for JUSTICE! Leon Dorsey Finney, Jr. always stood for what was right and equitable for All. It was the core of his being. As a young man, Leon was talented in exerting pressure on all levels of the establishment to ensure that people were treated fairly in the most essential areas of their existence: Jobs, Food, Shelter, Safety and Education. Leon was a master negotiator and had a reputation for never backing down – a power broker for those who were not given a fair shake. Leon would commonly be seen in the middle of a protest...we now have a name for it, Community Organizing. He stood with the likes of Saul Alinsky, Bishop Brazier, and Jesse Jackson. He spent his life through community organizing, his role as a pastor and a proud member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity working towards helping others and would commonly be heard sharing the old adage, "if you stand for nothing you will fall for anything". He was steadfast in his principles, but charismatic in the delivery. Leon dedicated his life to ensuring that his DASH between 1938 – 2020 was spent serving others.

As a young man, Leon knew his greatest joy came from serving the community in which he lived. He was trained in the art of community organizing by the legendary organizer Saul Alinsky and recruited to The Woodlawn Organization (TWO) by Bishop Artur Brazier in 1964. In 1967, he was promoted to Executive Director based on his hard work, and in 1969 became the President. His vision helped lay the foundation of the organization and solidified TWO as a voice for the African American community. Under his leadership TWO led the fight against social and economic discrimination.

From citing property owners who were deemed slumlords in the Woodlawn area, to organizing boycotts and marches, Leon was staunchly committed to tearing down the barriers that hindered African American progress. He was quoted as once saying, "We are about building communities because nobody can be an island unto themselves." It would become his life's work to support the continuous revitalization of the Woodlawn community and its surrounding areas, and he did just that! Making TWO and its development arm the Woodlawn Community Development Corp. (WCDC), at one point in time, the largest non-profit, African American housing management company in the United States, which employed more than 400 African Americans. Leon noted, "Some organizations focus on building and managing real estate. WCDC expands upon this idea to include developing people and creating a psychological sense of community"

In 1979, Leon was appointed as a member of the Chicago Planning Commission by then-Mayor Jane Byrne. This further solidified his position as a respected leader and driving force of Chicago's urban redevelopment. During the early 1980's, Leon was a force to be reckoned with and was intimately involved in working with a multi-racial coalition to get the city's first black mayor elected, Mayor Harold Washington (1983). In 1988, he retired from his position as head of TWO, shifting gears to use his voice on the national stage as the state campaign manager for Jesse Jackson during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. Leon would continue to be sought after and serve as counsel to influential local leaders such as Rham Emanuel and Toni Preckwinkle, as well as national leaders including Carol Mosley Braun and Barack Obama.

Rev. Finney's involvement in Chicago remained steadfast throughout his life as he served as the Vice Chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), sat on the Board of Trustees for Chicago State University, Board of Trustees for The YMCA and was a member of the Chicago Planning Commission. He also founded Christ Apostolic Church and served as its pastor until the church merged with Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church (MET) in Bronzeville, where he served as senior pastor. The church became a city landmark in 2007, once he saved the MET from being demolished.

Despite all that he accomplished and all the honors that were bestowed upon him, Rev. Finney believed it wasn't enough to just lead. To truly make an impact, he believed one needed to teach and build a legacy. This was evidenced through his creation of programs that developed future leaders like the African American Leadership program at McCormick Theological Seminary; where he taught African American Leadership Studies, and was responsible for training countless African American pastors receiving their Master degree. He also taught at the University of Chicago, Lutheran School of Theology, the University of Illinois, Northwestern University, Presbyterian College of Korea and the Theological College of the Bahamas. He also authored several publications on economic and social development.

'Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.'

Proverbs 17:6

To the city of Chicago Rev. Finney was an activist, businessman, and man of the cloth, but to his family he was a dutiful son, father, grandfather "Papa", and brother. He actively worked to preserve the legacy of his late father Leon Finney Sr. through his renowned restaurant, Leon's BBQ, which originally opened in 1940. Though the family sauce recipe remained a secret, Leon's love for the community was well known throughout the city. He consistently hired and trained those who lived in the neighborhood, needed job opportunities, and actively supported military and veteran organizations. He was a constant presence at the restaurant, and often could be found behind the counter working side-by-side with his staff.

Leon Dorsey Finney, Jr and the late Sharon McGaughey Finney had two children Kristin and Leon Dorsey Finney, III (Tre'). He played an active role in both of his children's lives and was a doting hands-on grandfather to Jaiden, Ava, and Gerald (Liam). He made sure they had a front row seat to what it meant to give back to their communities and build upon the Finney family legacy.

'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Matthew 25:23

On September 4, 2020, after a lifetime of service and dedication to social justice, Rev. Dr. Leon D. Finney Jr. was called home. He was preceded in death by his parents Leon D. Finney, Sr. and Adline Jones Finney, the mother of his children Sharon McGaughey Finney and their son Leon Dorsey Finney, III (Tre'). He is survived by his daughter Kristin Finney-Cooke, son-in-law Dr. Gerald Lynzie Cooke, three grandchildren Jaiden, Ava, and Gerald (Liam); siblings, Gwen, Zenobia (Rene), Michael, Michelle and Andre; former wife Attorney Georgette Greenlee; cousins Attorney James Montgomery, Warren Jones, former Secretary of Agriculture Michael Espy; Henry Espy and many more loving cousins, nieces, nephews and family-friends.

'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.'

Proverbs 22:6

Leon Dorsey Finney, Jr. was born, as he would say, on the 7th day of the 7th month 1938, in Louise, Mississippi to Adline Jones Finney and Leon Dorsey Finney, Sr. While he spent the early years of his childhood in the South, like many African Americans, his family relocated to Chicago as part of the Great Migration when he was a toddler. As his family worked to establish roots in their new urban environment, Leon's Mother died from tuberculosis when he was just 5 years old. His life is truly representative of the *African-Proverb: It takes a village to raise a child*. In the absence of his Mother, he was reared in his early years by his great Aunt Bertha (Bertie) Montgomery, a strong nurturer that represented the fullness of love. He learned to be grateful as a child of God and developed his charismatic social skills on the weekends from his great Aunt DeElla Montgomery Parker. Leon also spent a few years in Nashville, Tennessee where he lived with his grandparents who taught him to love learning and the power of education.

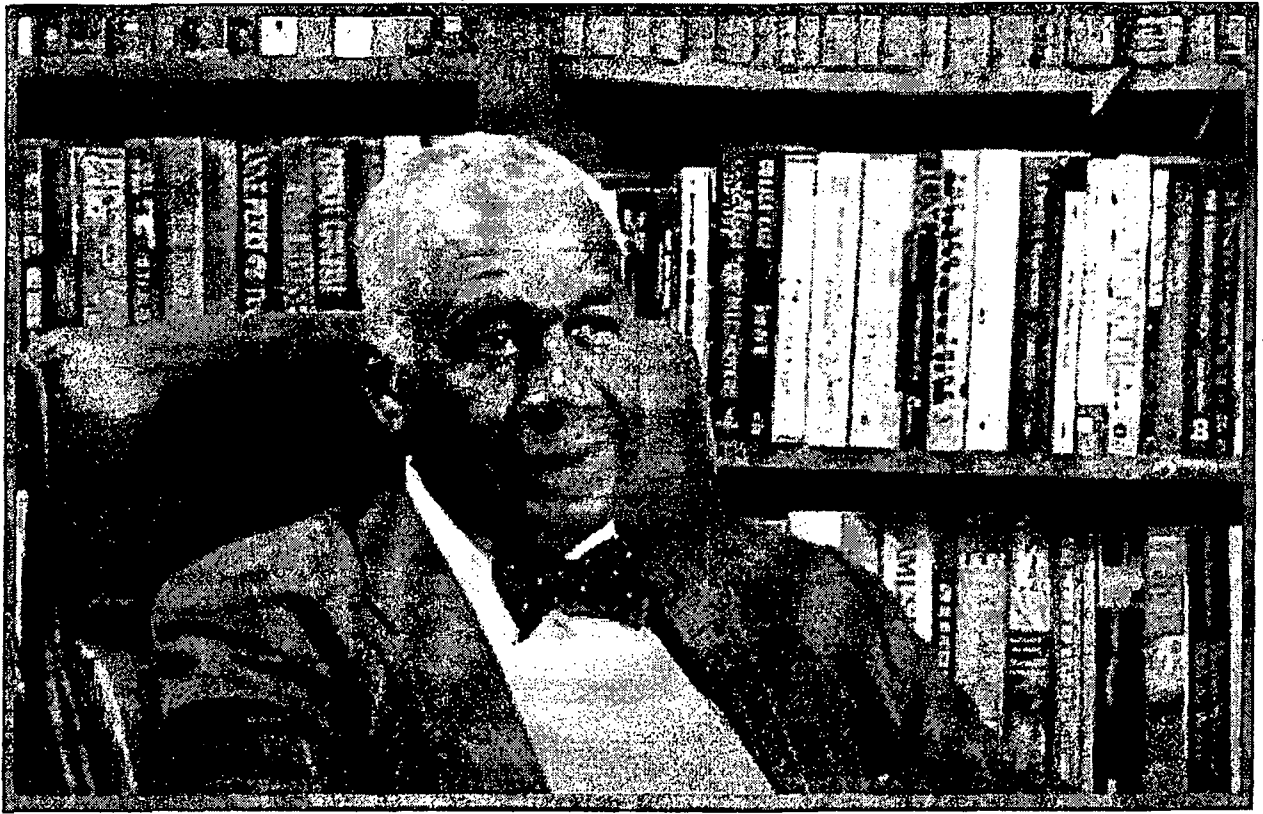
Leon attended Hyde Park Academy High School while working at his father's restaurant, Leon's Bar-B-Que, which also served as an after-hours Supper Club. Leon learned all aspects of the "store," as it was fondly called, including making gumbo on Friday's for late night customers, dusting chicken, cooking the ribs just right and of course the recipe to the infamous Leon's BBQ sauce. Like his father, Leon, Jr. had an unrelenting work ethic. He learned invaluable problem-solving skills, the value of a dollar and always had to think outside of the box when it came to money. His father, Leon Sr., never gave him the total amount of money needed for anything including books or clothes, but instead would give him 50% and tell him to figure out the rest from his own earnings. The important lesson of self-reliance was drilled into him at an early age.

Upon graduating from high school in 1957, Leon attended the University of Illinois followed by faithfully serving his country in the United States Marine Corp. During his enlistment, he worked in counterintelligence and spent time in San Diego at Camp Pendleton. This experience left a significant imprint on his being that he carried through his life experiences. He always approached situations as a Marine, Semper Fidelis (Semper Fi), which embodies the promise to always remain faithful, no matter what one encounters!

After being honorably discharged from the military, Leon began working in banking and finance at The First National Bank of Chicago as a Commercial Paper Trader. He was coined an "up and comer" that had great promise until he was lured away by the need for a deeper community connection. True to his love of learning, he later went on to earn post-baccalaureate degrees in economics, urban community development, theological studies and public administration from Goddard College, McCormick Theological Seminary and Nova University, respectively.

'For even the Son of Man did not come expecting to be served by everyone, but to serve everyone, and to give his life as the ransom price in exchange for the salvation of many.'

Mark 10:45



Leon Finney Jr., was a leader. He made an imprint in Chicago politics, locally and nationally, He will be missed. Chicago will be a lonely place without his face, but his spirit lives, as does his work for years to come. He was a shining light, not to tarnish as he says good night and farewell.