

RENEWAL

A POAH MIDWEST NEWSLETTER



POAH Remembers Two Woodlawn Legends: Rudy Nimocks and Dr. Leon Finney

The Woodlawn neighborhood recently suffered the loss of two of Chicago's most iconic community leaders, Rudy Nimocks, Sr., 91, and Rev. Leon Finney, Jr., 82.

Rudy Nimocks

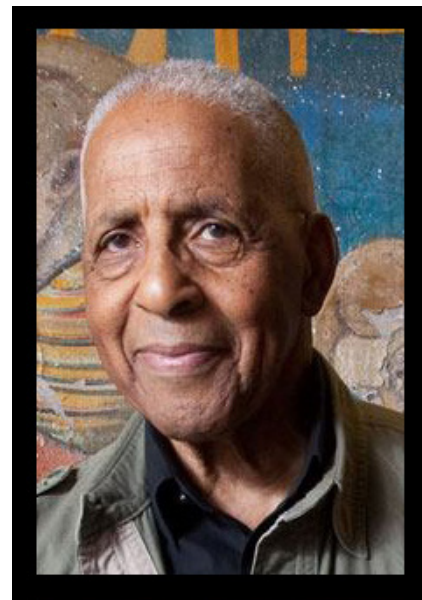
Rudy, a resident of the neighborhood since 1952, was the embodiment of civic engagement. An advocate for public safety, youth education and health care issues in the community, he helped anyone who needed help. Whether he was buying a pair of new shoes for a kid he walked home safely the night before or dropping off groceries to a hungry family coming to grips with a personal tragedy, Rudy devoted his life to the people and community of Woodlawn.

Rudy was a bus driver, fireman, insurance salesman and Army veteran before joining the Chicago Police Department (CPD) in 1959. From these diverse experiences, he believed that "the police should be part of the community, rather than apart from it." He rose through the ranks, becoming the first Black to lead both the city's Homicide Section and its Organized Crime Division, eventually being promoted to Deputy Superintendent, second in command of the entire department. After a 33-year career at the CPD, Rudy became chief of the University of Chicago Police Department. During his two-decade tenure, he quarterbacked an initiative to extend patrol services north into the North Kenwood-Oakland area and south into Woodlawn, as well as installing emergency telephones at key locations throughout the community. It was this move that helped significantly reduce crime in the area.

In 2009, Rudy became the University's Director of Community Partnerships in the Office of Civic Engagement where he extended the institution's collaborative partnerships with local organizations. One such effort resulted in the creation of the nonprofit Woodlawn Children's Promise Community. After growing frustrated with underachieving neighborhood schools, Rudy was among the community leaders who helped develop the organization's full range of academic, social, health and other support programs for Woodlawn's children and their families. At the same time, he was instrumental in the launch of the Chicago Youth Leadership Academy, a program that invited South Side teens to participate in three weeks of police-led exercise drills, education, and leadership workshops.

As University of Chicago President Robert Zimmer said, Rudy will be remembered as someone who "always focused on the well-being of others, specifically on the well-being of the communities that he served, and in particular the young people in these communities. He was always looking for the next step, the next important thing that could be done to make lasting change and to help the community. Change, of course, is not simple. I always greatly admired not only Rudy's determination to help make significant change, but his ability to carry it out."

In 2012, the community came together to show their appreciation for Rudy at the dedication of the 6100 block of South Greenwood as "Rudy and Joyce Nimocks Way," a tribute he shared with his wife of more than 50 years. "POAH will remember him as a tireless advocate for the initiatives that made Woodlawn a better place to live and for his commitment to improving the lives of its residents," said Felicia Dawson, Vice President, POAH Communities.



Jason Smith/University of Chicago

Rev. Leon Finney

A leader in the civil rights movement and relentless advocate for community development, Rev. Finney organized people around issues of housing, lack of employment, poverty, and gentrification. He did this as pastor and founder of the Christ Apostolic Church and later at the Metropolitan Apostolic Church. And many benefitted from his activism, including President Obama, Cook County President Toni Preckwinkle, U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, and Mayor Harold Washington.

"Dr. Finney's life and legacy have their fingerprints on the throttle of change in our city, state and nation," said U.S. Rep. Rush.

Working in Woodlawn throughout his life, Rev. Finney, who earned three master's degrees and two PhDs, pursued the creation of Black-led and Black-owned communities that offered the best affordable housing, access to good jobs and a quality education. He became a developer with Bishop Brazier at the Woodlawn Organization, which spawned the Woodlawn Community Development Corporation (WCDC) – an organization that saved six structures on South Kimbark from demolition and many long-time residents from displacement as one of its first projects.

WCDC would eventually develop nearly 1,700 new homes and apartments for low-to-moderate residents, totaling more than \$300 million in commercial and residential projects, mostly in Woodlawn and throughout the South Side. Rev. Finney and Brazier became the first developers to use the Low Income-Housing-Tax Credit to attract investment to the Black community so that, instead of by predatory or absentee landlords, properties could be locally owned and managed.

"Rev. Finney was many things – a community organizer, a developer, Marine, and a mentor – but the one common denominator was his love for and dedication to the community and its residents," said Felicia Dawson, Vice President, POAH Communities. "He will always be remembered as the Mayor of Woodlawn."



The Chicago Crusader