



THE CITY OF BRUNSWICK MARYLAND

1 WEST POTOMAC STREET · BRUNSWICK, MARYLAND 21716 · (301) 834-7500

Distinguished Citizen biography for:

Lillie Morris

1947-2014

Honored as a Distinguished Citizen in 2026

Lillie Morris devoted a lifetime to serving and helping others.

Born in 1947 at her aunt's home in Petersville, Lillie grew up on H Street in Brunswick, the daughter of Hester and George Hardy. Known affectionately to the family as "Belle," she had nine siblings. As she was raised during the Jim Crow era, Lillie Hardy attended the colored elementary school on I Street, where grades 1–6 were compelled to learn together in one classroom. Her daughter Lisa explained how Lillie later recognized the inequities in resources and textbooks when she attended the integrated Brunswick High School (BHS). Lillie's favorite teacher at the segregated school, Mrs. Camille Robbins, was one of many figures in the small town of Brunswick who helped shape the confidence and determination that would define her life.



Lillie became the first Black cheerleader at Brunswick High School, graduating in 1965. That milestone was just the beginning of her legacy of breaking barriers and opening doors for others. She dedicated 40 years to Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), spending her first 15 years as an elementary school teacher before moving to her alma mater, Brunswick High School, where she taught science and horticulture for 25 years. There, Ms. Lillie Morris returned to the sidelines as coach of the Railroaders' cheerleaders for both football and basketball, continuing the legacy she had begun as a student.

Her impact extended far beyond the classroom. Ms. Morris founded the Minority Essence Club at BHS, which she sponsored for more than 20 years. Through this club, over 100 students—from all races and backgrounds—experienced their first trip to New York City. Lillie organized and raised funds for the annual spring bus trips so that students could visit famous landmarks in and around Manhattan. These included the Apollo Theater and Darkchild Productions, the New Jersey studio of her nephew, Grammy-winning producer Rodney Jerkins. Rodney, with whom Lillie was close, has produced hits for artists such as Michael Jackson, Beyoncé, and Whitney Houston, among others. The club also hosted annual MLK Day celebrations and banquets featuring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s favorite foods, bringing families and the community together to honor his legacy.



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Lillie's commitment to children and working families led her to help found the Learning Tree Daycare Center, which was created by a group of African American women who saw a need for childcare in Brunswick. The center has served families for nearly 50 years and remains one of Lillie's most enduring contributions.

Faith was the foundation of Lillie's life. A lifelong member of the AME Church, she grew up at Ebenezer AME in Brunswick where her brother-in-law, Reverend Louis Bowie, was a pastor. In 1990, Lillie moved to Mount Zion AME in Knoxville, where she served as historian under Rev. Dyson and became a steward, as well as a member of the ministerial staff, the lay organization, the Homecoming Committee, and the Women's Day leadership. She taught Sunday School for more than 50 years. And she loved to sing—especially in the church choir, which performed at other churches and venues throughout the region. Music was one of her purest joys.

After retiring from FCPS, Lillie became certified in drug counseling, continuing her lifelong mission of helping others. She also served her community as a local Avon representative for 30 years. For a time, Lillie operated a consignment shop at Antiques and Old Stuff on East Potomac Street in memory of her mother Hester, providing space for about 15 small businesses to grow.

Lillie Hardy married Leo Morris, Sr., and together they raised three children: Leo Jr., Michelle, and Melissa ("Lisa"). Her warmth extended far beyond her family. Lillie was known around Brunswick as a caring, generous, and deeply loving woman. Lisa remembers watching her mother gather clothes she no longer wore and say, "I'm going to take these to someone who needs them." That was who she was—always giving, always serving.

Following Lillie's untimely passing in 2014, more than 700 people attended her funeral, a testament to the countless lives she touched. Her legacy lives on in the students she taught, the families she supported, the churches she strengthened, and the community she helped shape.

Lillie Morris spent her life in service—teaching, guiding, uplifting, and loving. Brunswick is better because she was here.

The Mayor and Council and the Brunswick History Commission are proud to honor Lillie Morris as a Distinguished Citizen of Brunswick, Maryland.