

## **New school honors educator, advocate Beulah Ralph**

*By Jacqueline LeBlanc*

Monica Naylor normally turns left out of the Thornbrook subdivision, where she lives, to go up Scott Boulevard. Because of recent construction, she now turns right. Naylor doesn't mind the detour, though, since she now passes the newly-built Beulah Ralph Elementary School, named in honor of her late mother.

"It's still unreal to me," Naylor said. "Who would have known that the school named in honor of my mother would happen to be built where I live?"

Beulah Ralph served as a community leader, mentor and educator at Columbia Public Schools for 58 years until her retirement in 2005. She died in 2010. Ralph originally took a job as a secretary at Douglass High School, her alma mater and at the time an all-black school, in 1947. She later created the Home School Communicator Program during the integration period. As director of the program, Ralph worked to ease the transition for minority students and families, as well as serving as liaison between families and white teachers and administrators.

"It was something new to the district...but I know that administrators and teachers certainly felt the success of the program right off the bat," Naylor said. "Because of this program, they had someone in their building they could rely on to take information to students they knew nothing about."

Since its creation, the program has grown and has been implemented in places both inside and outside the state of Missouri. It still serves as an important part of the district.

"Not only did she know the importance of education, but she also recognized that the opportunity may not have been there for everyone, and that was important to her—making sure that all individuals had the opportunity to a good education," Naylor said. "Even though her program started out being supportive of minority students, my mother represented all families and all children."

Being raised in Columbia, Ralph had a passion for children, families and her community, which fueled her lifelong advocacy. She wanted Columbia to be a place that everyone could look up to and feel good about being a part of, Naylor said.

"I remember hearing her say that she represented those who were unable to represent themselves," she said. "She was a voice for those in the community who are often disenfranchised and often don't have a voice."

The Columbia Public Schools Foundation named Ralph an outstanding retired educator in 2007, only one of the many accolades she received for her tireless advocacy throughout her lifetime. CPS posthumously honored Ralph in 2013 by unveiling the Beulah Ralph Memorial, located in front of Douglass High School.

"Having the school named after her really puts a stamp on the kind of person she was," Naylor said. "She was very special because she was always able to communicate with all parents and children, and they could leave feeling that something was accomplished, and it was something positive."