

**Dedication of the Dr. Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe Library and Learning Commons
Cranford High School**

by Jean Kreiling

On the morning of February 6, visitors arrived at Cranford High School to celebrate the dedication of the school library in honor of a remarkable woman. Stepping off the elevator, they were greeted by a large wall sign, *Dr. Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe Library and Learning Commons*.

Inside, a crowd was gathering. It was composed of representatives from various organizations, officials from both the county and the town and friends and relatives of Dr. Wolfe. Dr. H. Roy Partridge, the son of Dr. Wolfe, stood near the door to welcome the guests. He had driven from Maine with his wife Susan and their daughter Juliana Truesdale. His son Dr. Damani Partridge was also there. He had flown in from Michigan with his wife and daughter.

There was a feeling of excitement in the room. Everyone had come to celebrate Dr. Wolfe, an African-American who had lived a life of service that was filled with an amazing number of achievements. These had brought her numerous honors and awards. Yet, until now, she had remained a "hidden figure" in her hometown of Cranford.

The program was opened with speeches by the Principal of Cranford High School Mark Cantagallo and Dr. Scott Rubin the Superintendent of the Board of Education. They spoke about the many ways that Dr. Wolfe had distinguished herself and both thanked the Cranford Historical Society and its committee of Betty Crawley, Jean Kreiling and Pat Pavlak for having told them about Dr. Wolfe and proposed that she be honored. Other speakers included Freeholder B. J. Kowalski who contributed a plaque, Myrtle Counts, the president of the local NAACP, Reverend Alfred Brown, Jr., the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Cranford and students from the school, Cameron Matheson, Paige Carbone and Jaden Johnson-Feggans who gave brief histories of Dr. Wolfe's life. The grandchildren of Dr. Wolfe, Dr. Damani Partridge and Juliana Truesdale remembered their "nana" with personal stories. Near the end of her moving speech, Juliana said,

"In my nana's honor, I ask you - what is your dream? What is the legacy you will leave? What do you believe in with such conviction that it does not matter if not one person in the room looks or thinks or acts like you? What challenges will you accept? What ways will you make out of no way?"

Here is the inscription on the commemorative plaque which the Society gave to the library:

DR. DEBORAH CANNON PARTRIDGE WOLFE LIBRARY & LEARNING COMMONS

Born and raised in Cranford, Dr. Wolfe graduated from Cranford High School with honors in 1933 and earned a B.S. from Jersey City State Teachers College and an M.A. and Ed.D. from Columbia University.

Dr. Wolfe had many "firsts." She was the first African-American on the faculty at Queens College, City University of New York. She was the first African-American to serve on the New Jersey Board of Higher Education.

Appointed Chief of the Education and Labor Committee of the United States House of Representatives, she helped to shape groundbreaking civil rights laws which led to the creation of

Head Start, community colleges, vocational training, and financial aid which improved the lives of millions.

Dr. Wolfe was appointed to 4 Presidential commissions and was the Chief of the United Nations' non-governmental organizations. After becoming the first African-American woman to be ordained by the American Baptist Association, Dr. Wolfe became the associate pastor of the First Baptist Church in Cranford.

During her early career as the Head of the Department of Elementary Education at Tuskegee Institute, and before she became the Director of its Graduate Studies, Dr. Wolfe helped to build and to teach at a much-needed school. In gratitude for her work, a school in Shorter, Alabama now bears her name. In 2007, New Jersey City University honored Dr. Wolfe by naming its school of education The Deborah Cannon Partridge Wolfe College of Education. By the time of her death in 2004, Dr. Wolfe had received 26 honorary doctorates.

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The Cranford Historical Society