



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Wallace C. Higgins

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Award: Honoring Our Veterans

Year: 2015

Wally Higgins was born on November 11, 1925, the son of Alice & Daniel Higgins. He was raised on a small farm in Kendall, Orleans County, NY.

As soon as he turned 18 years old, Wally enlisted in the US Army Air Corps. Wally wanted to fly, having watched the P-36 & P-40 war planes fly testing runs over his home from the Curtis-Wright factory in Buffalo. His indoctrination into flying came by way of attending Civil Air Patrol classes in Rochester during his senior year. He attributes those meetings to playing a big role in furthering his interest in pursuing aviation. Wally has recently received the Congressional Gold Medal due to his CAP involvement during WW-II.

The Army took Wally on December 10, 1943. Initially reporting to Ft. Dix, NJ, he was sent to Biloxi, Mississippi for basic training and aptitude testing. As a result of his skin color and proficiencies, Wally was selected to be part of the Tuskegee Airmen experiment in Alabama. He trained in Pre-Flight at Tuskegee Institute, then completed his Primary Flight training, including solo runs in the P-17 Stearman. Wally spent 11 months at Tuskegee before a downturn in the war in Europe resulted in less pilot training at Tuskegee. Per the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., Wallace C. Higgins is in the official registry as a Documented Original Tuskegee Airman.

Wally was then transferred to the 1909th Engineers Aviation Battalion, and served in Saipan and Okinawa building roads, airfields and ammunition storage buildings. Wally was a sergeant in charge of an all-black, 30-man platoon. On March 17, 1947 Wally received his final Honorable Discharge as a Staff Sergeant with Squadron F, 3505th Army Air Force. For his military service, Mr. Higgins earned the WW-II Victory Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, American Campaign Medal, Army Good Conduct Medal, and New York State Medal for Merit.

Wally was accepted at the NYS College of Ceramics at Alfred University, and graduated with a BFA in ceramic design in 1952. While a student there, he met and married Norma Miller almost 64 years ago, and never left Alfred. They raised four children, still reside in Allegany County, and are blessed with nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Wally never left the field of industrial ceramic design. He was a model/mold-maker at Glidden Pottery in Alfred, then became a technical specialist at the NYS College of Ceramics at Alfred University, and went on to become an Associate Professor there, retiring in 1985 as Professor Emeritus. In addition to subsequent ceramic-related business ventures, Wally & Norma made many trips overseas – including Egypt, Morocco, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Israel and Zambia – teaching and providing assistance in the fields of industrial ceramic design, ceramic manufacturing equipment and model/mold-making. To this day, Wally periodically provides consulting and assistance in his fields of expertise.

Wally has spent decades and continues in public service with many organizations in Allegany County: Alfred Lions Club, Alfred Station Fire Dept., Union University Church, Allegany County Office for the Aging, TRIAD, Allegany Senior Foundation, and Baker's Bridge Historical Society.