

Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities Foundation to name STEM Center in honor of Alma Irene Atich

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities will dedicate and name its STEM Center in memory of education and social rights champion Alma Irene Aitch.

The Alma Irene Aitch STEM Center, located at the former Kraft Building at 1310 N. Main Street, Edwardsville, adjacent to the MJCH, will be home to programming which connects the human and technical dimensions of the humanities and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). There will be an open house at the new center on Wednesday, Dec. 6 from 12 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Mannie Jackson, MJCHF Foundation President, will be present to give his comments on the new center and its role in the region at 2 p.m. Guests will receive tours, and can enjoy refreshments and snacks.

Aitch dedicated her life to others, and believed that every person should have the opportunity to demonstrate their intellectual ability, live in a democratic and free society, and have equal access to public education.

“She taught her students the importance of learning and serving while teaching life lessons and building character,” said Mannie Jackson. “Her kindness and generosity were on display at all times, which she believed to be the foundation of our society.”

Born in Union, Missouri, Aitch was a dedicated educator and pioneer, earning her teaching certificate from Lincoln Normal School, Jefferson City, Missouri, and postgraduate degree from Lincoln University.

Her teaching career began in 1923 as a teaching aide in Jefferson City, Missouri. Her journey then carried her to Lincoln Grammar School, Edwardsville, Illinois, from 1924 to 1951, as African American teachers were not hired or considered during the schools desegregation period, thus many world class educators, such as Ms Aitch, were left unemployed.

Nephews Herman Shaw and Dr. Harry Shaw shared their fond memories of their Aunt Alma Aitch. “I remember as a youth growing up watching and listening to my family of educators, including my Aunt Alma Irene Aitch, discussing on a regular basis the importance of education, which influenced my decision to pursue this outstanding profession. Aunt Aitch was an excellent example of service, always willing to help the needy and those who could not provide for themselves. Her commitment to our youth continues to serve as an inspiration to all of us,” said Herman Shaw.

“Aunt Aitch was the long-term educator in our family. She instilled within us the need to expand our world views and our places in the world. She stressed daily that in order to achieve success, we must have an education. She demonstrated through her life achievements and commitment to service that one person can make a difference,” said Dr. Harry Shaw, former Associate Dean at the University of Florida.

“In the early part of the 20th century, educators and regional thought leaders—particularly if they were women of color—were often overlooked in terms of their critical contribution to teaching the skills essential for a pluralistic democracy. Alma Irene Aitch is certainly one of those people and it is fitting that the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities Foundation STEM center bear her name as one of our region’s pioneers in education,” said Jackson.

Aitch’s courage and sacrifice established a lasting legacy for future generations, as she was known for her service to others and a helping hand for those in need. Her volunteerism included membership to organizations such as the Madison County Tuberculosis Sanitarium, Secretary for Church Women United, Girl Scout Brownie, Edwardsville Area League of Women Voters, and the Madison County Historical Society.

On Feb. 14, 2001, Aitch was honored by the Missouri House of Representatives on her 100th birthday, highlighting her incredible education career, the journey she traveled for social justice, her life of respect, generosity, and more importantly, her dedication and commitment to the education profession, for which young people can aspire.

The STEM hub for Madison County youth will utilize programs including urban gardening, math games league, digital humanities, and robotics, among others. Hands on activities and curriculum at the Alma Irene Aitch STEM Center will be used for finding critical solutions to fundamental social and human problems using the MJCH’s core principles – respect, dignity, understanding, and forgiveness. Learn more at www.mjchf.org and www.lc.edu/MJCH.