



Charles S. Chestnut, III

August 1, 1940 - December 4, 2023

Civil Rights leader and Chestnut Funeral Home owner Charles S. Chestnut III, the first African American member of the Alachua County School Board and former Alachua County Commissioner, has died at age 83.

Chestnut graduated from the former all-Black Howard High School in Ocala in 1958 before going on to attend what is now Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach and in 1961 earning his degree from Eckels School of Mortuary Science in Philadelphia. Two years later, he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the 200,000 people who marched on Washington to hear the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. deliver his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech - later telling an interviewer that he knew at that moment he was witnessing history.

Chestnut himself played a pivotal role in the history of Gainesville and the larger story of North Central Florida. Having acquired while in Philadelphia a desire to bring progress and equality to the Jim Crow South, Chestnut returned to the family funeral home newly motivated to move the needle on Civil Rights.

As a local leader in the Civil Rights movement, Chestnut coordinated sit-ins with friends at the whites-only counters of Woolworth's, McCrory's and other local drugstores. He became president of the Alachua County NAACP Youth Council and worked to secure equal access to public accommodations for the Black residents of Alachua County. Once that goal was reached, he refocused his activism on voters' rights, rolling out a campaign to register Blacks to vote.

Chestnut was married to Gainesville City Commissioner Cynthia Moore Chestnut for more than 40 years and is father to five children, including Alachua County Commissioner Charles "Chuck" Chestnut IV, and local businessman and attorney Chris Chestnut. He remained a strong and stalwart Civil Rights and business leader throughout his life.

"His shoulders were the shoulders that so many, not only here in Florida, but around the country, stood on," said City of Gainesville Mayor Harvey Ward. "Throughout his life, he continued speaking truth to power. Unconquered here on earth, his legacy will continue to lift us up and his light will continue to shine. This is a lifetime of good work that will roll onward. We thank his family for sharing Charles Chestnut with all of us for all these decades. His loved ones are in our hearts as they celebrate this remarkable life."

Chestnut served on the Alachua County School Board from 1976-1992 and on the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners from 1992-2000. He was

a lifetime member of the NAACP, a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, a loyal lifetime member of Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church of Gainesville, and a U.S. Army veteran.

For additional information, please contact City of Gainesville Public Information Officer Rossana Passaniti at 352-393-7842 or PassanitiR1@GainesvilleFL.gov.

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Tribute Wall



“ 2 files added to the album Obituary Wall



Chestnut Funeral Home - March 14, 2024 at 11:10 AM

EB

“ Eleanor Boston lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III



Eleanor Boston - December 22, 2023 at 12:00 AM

DJ

“ We would like to send heartfelt condolences to the Chestnut Family.

Deneace Joshua-McGill and family



Deneace Joshua-McGill - December 21, 2023 at 12:00 AM

MD

“ My Deepest Most Sincere Heartfelt Condolences To The Chestnut Family.

Marty M. Dixon

Marty Dixon - December 20, 2023 at 12:00 AM

KB

“ *The Office of the City Clerk would like to extend its sincere condolences to Commissioner Chestnut, her family, & all who loved Mr. Chestnut.*

Kristen Bryant - December 18, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AN

“ *Our thoughts and prayers are with you.*

Anonymous - December 18, 2023 at 12:00 AM

OG

“ *My prayers and thoughts to the Family..*

With love, Otto "Tony" and Deidra Graham

Otto Graham - December 18, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CG

“ *We extend our deepest sympathies to the entire Chestnut Family & Funeral Home constituents. Mr. Chestnut was a well loved and well known general in the City of Gainesville and in the funeral industry. Mr. Chestnut buried our father, Dr. Daniel E. Gainey (10) years ago and ironically HE is being funeralized and buried on our father's birthday, 12/18. We will never forget his dedicated service to so many of us. Our prayers are with you all today and in the days to come. 🙏🙏*

- The family of Elder Dr. Daniel E. Gainey

Corliss Gainey - December 18, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AN

“ We extend our deepest condolences to the Chestnut family. May God's unfailing love be your comfort and strength in the days ahead.

Anonymous - December 17, 2023 at 12:00 AM

RR

“ Ronald Robinson lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III



Ronald Robinson - December 17, 2023 at 12:00 AM

PL

“ I am one of the many fans of "C-3" who is saddened to offer deepest condolences. It is a painful lost to the Chestnut family and the world.

Mr. Charles Chestnut, III was a great man, a great leader, and humble giant always willing to help make our world a better place. I have known him since I was 13--that's many decades ago. He has never ceased to be the sophisticated official, gentleman, and awesome community leader that he is--a trait his dear son "Chuck" exhibits as well.

In his memory, I am making a donation to Tee Foundation Assistance Network, Inc. for the endowed Tiawana Michele Wheeler Memorial Scholarship fund we are working to grow at our beloved Bethune-Cookman University.

When Mr. Chestnut presided over the funeral of my God brother, the late Richards S. Simmons decades ago, it was then I learned how close the two of them were as a result of some of the sentiments he shared at the burial service.

I said to him, I didn't know you knew Richard like that. He shared some amusing anecdotes about their relationship that helped to ease the pain of lost I was feeling. I wish I could do that for all of you. All I can do is pray that for each of you...Peace be still.

Patricia Lee - December 17, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CS

“ 1st time meeting Grandpa Chestnut

Cortez Sherrod - December 16, 2023 at 12:00 AM

EE

“ May it comfort you to know others are thinking of you at this difficult time; with our deepest Sympathy.

Eric and Patricia Echols - December 16, 2023 at 12:00 AM

TF

“ We share your sadness regarding the passing of your beloved one and our inspiring civic leader, Mr. Charles Chestnut III. May you find comfort while reflecting on cherished memories and his great legacy, and may he rest in peace.
The Rochelle Spence Family

The Rochelle Spence Family - December 16, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AW

“ On behalf of A. Jerome Brown Funeral Home LLC and staff, we send you our sincere condolences. " A Life Well Lived!" May God continue to smile, bless you and keep you.
Thank you,
A. Jerome Brown Funeral Home LLC
High Springs, FL

Alyce C. Brown Williams - December 15, 2023 at 12:00 AM

DW

“ My sincere condolences to the entire family.
The Goston family.

Darrell and LaTanya Williams - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

EH

“ On behalf of my family we extend our condolences. We thank you for him for the services he personally rendered to and for the Hayes family. He was a servant to the people. God bless Mr. Chestnut family.

evelyn Hayes - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ Thank you for your leadership and legacy.

Jacqueline Johnson and The Cue Family - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

JE

“ Sending our love and deepest sympathy to the Chestnut family

Joyce and Jeanne Cosby, Carolyn Edwards - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

DW

“ Darrell And LaTanya Williams lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III



Darrell and LaTanya Williams - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

EH

“ Evelyn Hayes lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III



evelyn Hayes - December 14, 2023 at 12:00 AM

FL

“ *To: The Chestnut family
Frank and Roberta Lopez want you to know that we are thinking of you with sympathy at this difficult time. May you see God's love in the faces of family and friends.*

Frank and Roberta Lopez - December 13, 2023 at 12:00 AM

DF

“ *Please accept our most heartfelt sympathies for your loss... Our thoughts are with you and your family during this difficult time.*

Dr.Lakesha Butler, Brittani DePeiza and UF Health Family - December 13, 2023 at 12:00 AM

TT

“ *Condolences to the Chestnut Family, May the Lord continue to give peace that surpasses all understanding, healing, and blessings overflowing.*

The Brothers of 2000-Chi Theta-FSU - December 13, 2023 at 12:00 AM

PT

“ *To Cynthia Chestnut and family, Thinking of all of you during this sad time. Please accept our sympathy and condolences.*

Pauline Taylor & the Haven Team - December 12, 2023 at 12:00 AM

RK

“ *My condolences. May God give you peace as you move through this time of separation and loss. May the memory of Mr. Chestnut's love, kindness, and care encourage your hearts always.*
-Rev. Dr. Debra Walker King

Rev. Dr. Debra King - December 12, 2023 at 12:00 AM

TL

“ Thank you for your service. You handled the home goings for alot of my family members, thank you Mr chestnut.

Thomas long - December 12, 2023 at 12:00 AM

TF

“ We would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to Mr. Charles S. Chestnut, III Family, Friends & Staff. Our prayers are with you!

Mr. Chestnut and our father, the late Mr. Cornelius Towns were longtime acquaintances.

We appreciate all that he and his staff did to help & comfort us during our families time of bereavement.

He was very kind, helpful, absolutely proficient and professional.

And, he always left a lasting impression on all of us whenever we encountered him.

He will definitely be remembered and truly missed!

The Towns Family of Alachua & Jacksonville, FL



The Towns Family - December 12, 2023 at 12:00 AM

RW

“ Words can't express the thanks of this man who was a substitute father many times talking to me like a son he was more than just my boss he was a father he and his son's trust me to aid and take care of his late mother Doris Gary Chestnut and she was something else he even allowed me to drive her in old grey car I think it was a el Camino I will never forget you sir he taught me so much that I followed in the profession this man was a legend not for Gainesville Florida but the world 🌍 I have to say this he even told me about the moment his grandfather Daddy charlie came and got him from Bethune Cookman I will miss you UNC Thank you Auntie Cynthia, Chris , Chuck, Pam, Candice, Janice, Tia you have my prayers, Rev . Raymond Washington

Raymond Washington - December 12, 2023 at 12:00 AM

SS

“ So very sorry for the family's loss...love and prayers for the family 🙏🙏🙏



Sarah Stevens - December 11, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CH

“ To the Chestnut Family. Our Families have known each for years {The Henderson Family}. Mrs. Chestnut has worked with my aunt on several projects within the community. The Funeral Home has helped us growing up as kids, with different fundraiser and different project we have worked on. I am going to miss Mr. Chestnut so much, because when I would see him, he would say "sing something for me please, and then I'll let you go." I would pass their house although they didn't know it, my husband and I loved the house and would say" hello Mr. and Mrs. Chestnut. I am glad I had a chance to see him, and that Million Dollar smile, and Chris before he went home to glory. Please be blessed, and please stay close and Pray that Gods give you all the strength you will need to get through this. I am going to miss, Mr. Chestnut, he was the type of person, like my granny - that would say "ole am doing alrite, but could see that something that wrong". He will be missed by Gainesville. Rest in Heavenly Peace!



Christina - December 11, 2023 at 12:00 AM

WD

“ My condolences to the Chestnut family and may God continue to comfort you in your time of bereavement.



Willie Mae (Middleton) Davis - December 09, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CT

“ So sorry for your loss.

Corine C Taylor - December 09, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CT

“ *Corine C Taylor lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III*



Corine C Taylor - December 09, 2023 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ *We express our deepest sympathy to the Chestnut Family...May the Lord lift each one's heart of all family and friends of a life well lived. Let's continue to keep the family and friends in prayer..*



JONES. KELLY, MOSS & FAMILY - December 09, 2023 at 12:00 AM

MD

“ *We are sorry for your loss a Legend Mr.Charles S Chesnut who have done a lot for our family the (Prices & Bryant's Our Deepest Sympathy goes out to the Chesnut family and the Chesnut Staff we Love you all and Our prayers will continue to be with you all especiallymy friend Charles God has your back....Mrs.Angela Gaskin*



Mrs Angela Gaskin (Mrs.Price Daughter) - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

MN

“ *With Deepest Sympathy to family at this of bereavement.praying that God continues to lift the family up during this time of loss,Forever resting in God's eternal arms, Gone but always in our hearts.*



Milligan Naomi - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

MF



Mark J. Fisher - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CF

“ *Clarice Ford lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III*



clarice ford - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

PH

“ *Peggy Henderson lit a candle in memory of Charles S. Chestnut, III*



Peggy Henderson - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

RM

“ *Rutha Milligan-Mims*

Our Sincere Condolences to the Chestnuts Family and Love One.

The Chestnut Family's Loss is Our Loss. To this community and surrounding cities.

We the Milligan' and Chestnut ' were long time Acquaintance and Associates for many years since the 50's. Charles will be solely missed by many.

Praying for Strength and Comfort for the Chestnut Family.

"The Milligan Family"



Rutha Milligan-Mims - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AD

“ *The Epitome of a Gentleman. May he now Rest, Until Then ...*

Anthony "Ted " Felder , California Lic Funeral Director - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

CR

“ *Our heartfelt condolences to the family from ours. Praying for strength for the entire family from Caesar and Sophia Robinson*

Caesar & Sophia robinson - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

R(

“ *Our deepest condolences to the Chestnut Family.*

The Andrews and Watson Families 🙏



Ramoth and Barbara Andrews (Watson) - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AN

“ *The Sharpe Family (Cleve, "Barbara", Debra, Tami, Leslie, and Ashlei) sends our deepest condolences.*

Anonymous - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

ED

“ *HEARTFELT
Mrs Ernestine S Dorsey
Gainesville Florida*



Ernestine S Dorsey - December 08, 2023 at 12:00 AM

SR

“ *My Condolences to the Chestnut family and friends who love and adored Mr. Charles. Now he's resting in the arms of lord and savior. Be blessed*



Sheila Robinson - December 07, 2023 at 12:00 AM

PM

“ *My condolences to Commissioner Cynthia Chestnut and the entire Chestnut family. Thank you Mr. Chestnut for your stellar service to our community and to my family on countless moments of grief. You will never be forgotten.*



P. Breon Middleton - December 07, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AM

“ I will always remember every time I walked into his presence "hey baby how you doing?!" and all the wisdom he always shared about life and business. He was truly a giant of a man RIP Sir! My condolences and prays for Gods comfort and strength for the family.
AMAC

Alphonso McClendon - December 07, 2023 at 12:00 AM

FC

“ My deepest condolences and sincere sympathies to the family. Your loss is our loss as well! The Gainesville community as I knew it before moving away looked kindly and respectfully to the entire Chestnut family. Be blessed and May God bless you with peace in your soul.

Frank & Sheryl Coleman - December 07, 2023 at 12:00 AM

AP

“ Sending condolences and prayers to the Chestnut family. Mr. Chestnut's legacy for civil-rights and community leadership will be remembered.

Anna Prizzia - December 07, 2023 at 12:00 AM

PL

“ My thoughts and Prayers are with the Chestnut family. Our family has been entwined with Mr. Chestnut for over 40 plus years. I am at a loss for words, Mr. Chestnut will truly be missed.
We love you always and forever.
The "Lofton Family" "Staggers Family" and Mrs. Willie B. Curry Family from Ocala.

With Love from Pamela Lofton

Pamela Lofton - December 06, 2023 at 12:00 AM

EL

“ *My thoughts and prayers are with the Chestnut Family. Earl Lowman Jacksonville, Florida.* 🙏🙏

Earl Lowman - December 06, 2023 at 12:00 AM