

MARJORIE WILSON (PENALVER)



Marjorie Wilson Penalver

Marjorie Wilson Penalver died on August 25, 2010. She was the first African-American teacher hired by the Ithaca School District (in 1955) and taught English at IHS. Born on March 26, 1928, she was a native of Greensboro, North Carolina. She received a Bachelor's Degree in English from Bennett College for Women in 1948. Her teaching career spanned 48 years, beginning at Lincoln High School in Wilkesboro, North Carolina, and ending at The Learning Center in Encino, California, where she was a tutor, in 1996.

Her move north led her to the love of her life and husband of 50 years until his death in 2008, Theodore "Ted" Penalver. Although being married to an Air Force serviceman required the family to move frequently, Marjorie secured teaching positions everywhere their travels took them. She headed the English Department at Edison High School in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania from 1963 to 1967, and taught English, speech, and journalism at Edmunds High School in Sumter, South Carolina from 1967 to 1970. The following year she taught English at Okaloosa Walton Junior College in Niceville, Florida and also English as a Second Language to foreign-born prisoners incarcerated at Eglin Air Force Base. Upon returning to Ithaca in 1973, she resumed her teaching position at IHS. She became Vice Principal in 1979.

In 1986 Marjorie was given an award by the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission for her role in implementing multi-cultural education. The Marjorie N. Penalver Award still exists and is given to the educator who has done the most in the area of human rights by increasing awareness of diversity or issues of oppression within Tompkins County. A member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority for over 40 years, Marjorie was a charter member and founder of the sorority's Ithaca Alumnae Chapter, which

celebrated its 30th year in 2009. The Delta Sigma Theta Ithaca Alumnae Chapter Penalver Award, established in 1986 in honor of both Marjorie and Theodore Penalver, is a scholarship award presented each year to African American senior high school students who have demonstrated strong academic motivation and diligence combined with a contribution towards multi-culturalism.