

JAMES WILLIAM SMITH-BETSILL, SCHOOL BASKETBALL STAR, ACTIVIST AND PUBLIC SERVANT

(By Paul Zeise)

James William Smith-Betsill, a high school and college basketball standout at Franciscan University who later became a community leader and civil rights activist in Wilkinsburg and Hazelwood, has died.

Mr. Smith-Betsill, 67, was diagnosed with leukemia in February and died May 5 at Harrisburg Hospital of a viral infection.

Mr. Smith-Betsill was born James Betsill in 1935, and lived in Hazelwood until he was a sophomore in high school. He was 6 feet 6 inches tall, athletic and strong, but as a young black man playing in the City League of Allderdice High School, his opportunities to earn a college scholarship were limited.

The summer before his junior year, however, he was recruited to play at Homestead High School by the school's coach, Charles "Chick" Davies, so he moved in with a family in Homestead and had his name legally changed to James Smith.

Mr. Smith-Betsill's brother, Lawrence Betsill of Doylestown, Bucks County, said changing his name and moving across the Glenwood Bridge was one of the most important moves his brother ever made.

"At that time, blacks needed to do whatever it was they could do in order to get into college sports," said Betsill.

"The adoption was purely for basketball reasons. Jim still had a bed at our house and came home to sleep most nights." The coach at Allderdice tried to file a suit to stop it, but at the time the WPIAL couldn't do anything about it and neither could the courts because the Smiths were his legal guardians.

"Had he not made the move, he probably wouldn't have gotten a chance to go to college."

After earning all-state honors twice at Homestead and graduating in 1954, Mr. Smith earned a scholarship to play basketball for the College of Steubenville, now Franciscan University.

Mr. Smith-Betsill played for coach Hank Huzma at Steubenville and became a two-time small college All-American. He averaged more than 20 rebounds per game throughout his career and his 2,427 career rebounds is believed to be an NAIA record.

He was drafted in the second round of the 1958 NBA draft by the Boston Celtics. But he never got a chance to play for the Celtics because he also got drafted into the Army.

He continued his basketball career in the Army and toured Europe and the United States as a member of the All-Army team. But he developed knee problems and after he was discharged in 1960, he failed tryouts with the Celtics and also with the Pittsburgh Rens of the ABL.

"Jimmy is the best player to ever come out of the University of Steubenville. He put this school on the map the same way that Maurice Stokes did for St. Francis," said Kuzma. "But when he came out of the Army, he wasn't the same player because of his knees. It is a shame, because had he played right out of college, he'd have probably had a nice NBA career and be remembered like the Chuck Coopers and Maurice Stokes."

Mr. Smith-Betsill moved to Wilkinsburg in the early 1960s, was hired by Action Housing and began a career of public service that lasted until he retired in 1997.

His first job was with the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity program as a community organizer. A big part of his job was training short-term volunteers to become community servants and be directed a number of redevelopment projects in Hazelwood.

He also trained men to take and pass apprenticeship tests in order to develop trades.

But unions were segregated at the time and blacks weren't given opportunities to join them.

Mr. Smith-Betsill organized many protests and pickets, which eventually helped to break the color barrier in several powerful unions.

"During those days I was like his bail bondsman," said his widow, Mary Harris-Betsill. "He was constantly getting arrested because he was picketing at the headquarters of unions and at various construction jobs. And the fact that he was leading protests wasn't popular. We received countless death threats, bomb threats and burning house threats. Jim was a hero of sorts to the people in the community."

He also was a calming influence in Hazelwood when riots broke out in Pittsburgh in 1969.

"Every day during those riots, Jim would get up early and walk the streets and encourage people to stay calm," said Harris-Betsill. "Some days, he'd have a lot of people walk with him; others he'd be by himself. It was tense at that point, but he was determined to make sure that the neighborhood stayed intact."

Mr. Smith-Betsill's willingness to step in and help anyone who needed assistance had an impact on thousands of people, but it nearly cost him his life in the fall of 1976. He was at a Howard Johnson's restaurant in Oakland watching the Steelers play when another patron became drunk, got loud and began harassing other customers. Mr. Smith-Betsill stepped in and tried to calm the man down, but the man pulled a gun and shot him in the face.

"That was the first time I fully realized how many people's lives he touched," said Harris-Betsill, "because so many people came to visit him at the hospital that they moved him to a bigger room and there was still a number of people who couldn't get in to see him."

Mr. Smith-Betsill moved to Harrisburg in 1972 and took a job with the Pennsylvania Department of Education as the western regional director of the Bureau of Corrections Education. He developed and implemented curriculum programming guidelines that provided inmates with educational opportunities.

Mr. Smith-Betsill remained active in a variety of different community service projects throughout his life and even after he retired. He also was an active member of the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in Harrisburg.

In addition to his wife, survivors include two daughters, Tracey R. Betsill of Harrisburg and Michelle Heggs of Pikesville, Md.; two sons, James P. Betsill and Michael E. Betsill, both of Harrisburg, seven sisters; three brothers; and five grandchildren.

He was buried Friday in Harrisburg.

A SPECIAL TRIBUTE TO
AEROQUIP-INOAC ON THEIR
OSHA VPP RECOGNITION

HON. PAUL E. GILLMOR

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 12, 2002

Mr. GILLMOR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay special tribute to an outstanding corporation based in Ohio's Fifth Congressional District. I am happy to announce that the employees of Aeroquip-inoac in Fremont, Ohio, have recently achieved an extraordinary level of success. The Aeroquip-inoac Corporation will

receive OSHA's highest level of Voluntary Protection Programs (VPP) safety and health management certification, that of Star Participant, on Friday, June 14, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Aeroquip-inoac took it upon themselves to participate in the VPP by establishing a cooperative relationship between management, labor, and OSHA officials. Management established an effective program that meets the set OSHA requirements, and labor employees agreed to participate in an effort to assure a safe and healthful workplace. OSHA has verified that the program meets the established criteria and is recognizing the Aeroquip-inoac Corporation for attaining the highest level of success.

Aeroquip-inoac has joined the ranks of .01% of the six million companies in the U.S. to be recognized by OSHA under their Voluntary Protection Programs by achieving that status of Star Participant. As a company that produces Class A painted exterior trim products for the automotive industry I applaud them on their cooperative effort, which involved all of the 500 employees. This program not only increased employee motivation to work safely, but also increased productivity by reducing the number of lost workdays due to injury.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to stand and join me in paying special tribute to the Aeroquip-inoac Corporation. Businesses in the U.S. are served well through participation in these types of voluntary programs, and like Aeroquip-inoac, show what the American spirit of cooperation can accomplish. I am confident that the Aeroquip-inoac Corporation will continue to improve their safety and health programs and I wish them well in their future endeavors.

REMEMBERING DR. WILLIAM
NATHAN DANSBY

HON. CARRIE P. MEEK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 12, 2002

Ms. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in remembrance of the late Dr. William Nathan Dansby, a remarkable man whose personal achievement and community service are an example to us all.

Dr. William Nathan Dansby, 84, was born in Mobile, Alabama. He was educated in private elementary and secondary schools, including Stillman College (then Stillman Institute). He received the bachelor of science degree from Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, a master's degree in chemistry from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, and a doctorate in dental surgery from Meharry Medical College, also, in Nashville. A proud Fraternity man, he was elected to Beta Kappa Chi and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

A decorated veteran of World War II, Dr. Dansby served with distinction in the U.S. Army. He was appointed by the Tuscaloosa City Council to the City Board of Education in 1970 and was elected chairman of the board in 1985. He served on boards of directors of the Black Warrior Council of the Boy Scouts, the Martin Luther King, Jr. School National Network, the Benjamin Barnes YMCA, and the Maude L. Whatley Health Center. He was,