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# PRESS RELEASE

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## **106-YEAR-OLD NYCHA RESIDENT RECOGNIZED FOR HER DAILY PARTICIPATION IN TENANT PATROL**

One hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon 106-year-old Susie Mushatt Jones takes her turn sitting with the tenant patrol at Vandalia Avenue Houses, a seniors-only New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) development in the East New York section of Brooklyn. She was recognized for her achievements during the Family Day celebration at Vandalia today when letters from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and NYCHA Chairman Tino Hernandez were read to her in praise of her dedication.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg extended his wishes for “good health and great happiness” in a birthday message to Ms. Jones, noting that, “I applaud your continued efforts on behalf of the New York City Housing Authority’s tenant patrol network”. NYCHA Chairman Tino Hernandez described her as “a model of joy and vitality to your fellow residents and to all New Yorkers” in a letter commemorating her birthday.

Born Susie Mushatt on July 6, 1899, in Lowndes County, Alabama, to Mary and Callie Mushatt, her father was a sharecropper who picked cotton to support his wife and ten children. As a youth, Ms. Jones attended the Calhoun Colored School in Calhoun, Alabama, which was founded in 1892. She is proud of the fact that Booker T. Washington was an original member of the school’s Board of Trustees.

As a graduate of the Calhoun Colored School, Ms. Jones applied to Tuskegee University, also in Alabama, and was accepted, but her parents couldn’t afford the tuition. Ms. Jones says that this missed opportunity is the reason she places such an importance on college education.

One of Ms. Jones’ many achievements includes the work she and her fellow classmates, who founded the “Calhoun Club,” have done helping to provide financially disadvantaged children with scholarships or loans to help pay for their college educations. Ms. Jones, who was once the club’s president, is still a contributing member. In honor of her work for the Calhoun Club the Harvard University Library Open Collections Program presented a portfolio of prints of the Calhoun Colored School during the Family Day celebration to Ms. Jones.

In 1922, Ms. Jones left Alabama and headed north, settling first in New Jersey before moving to New York City in 1923, where she found employment as a live-in housekeeper and childcare provider.

Ms. Jones lived through many historic events, including the Civil Rights Movement. "I remember when I met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," she said. "It was during his book signing tour at the Blumstein's store." Dr. King stopped at the Blumstein's department store, formerly located on West 125th in Harlem, to promote his book entitled, "Stride Toward Freedom." Ms. Jones also witnessed the Harlem Renaissance (approximately 1920 to 1930), and the women's struggle for the right to vote, granted in 1920.

According to Valerie Price, Ms. Jones' goddaughter and niece, who works in NYCHA's Manhattan Housing Applications Office, "Susie has sponsored relatives and friends in their quest to find a better life by helping them migrate from the South to New York City."

In addition to her work with the Calhoun Club, Ms. Jones promised herself that she would send the first girl born into her own family to college. True to her word, on the meager salary of \$50 a week she made as a housekeeper and childcare provider, Ms. Jones financed her niece Lavilla Watson's college education.

Lavilla, who today is known as Dr. Lavilla Watson, is just one of the three nieces that Ms. Jones has put through college. And she still finds the time for her 13 Godchildren. Gestures like these only confirm the altruistic personality of Ms. Jones, or "Tee," as most who know her call her.

Her favorite memory: "It was the time I spent living with Lavilla helping her to raise her children." She waits faithfully on Mondays and Sundays for Lavilla's children, Audrey and Russell Watson, to place their weekly call to her.

On July 3, 2005 Ms. Jones' friends and family gathered at the Bronx home of her nephew, Callie Jr., to celebrate her birthday. According to Ms. Price, "We all had a really great time and Tee was very happy."

Ms. Jones attributes her longevity to good health and loving relationships. "I never drink or smoke," she said. "I surround myself with love and positive energy. That's the key to long life and happiness."

Ms. Jones has been a resident of the same apartment at Vandalia Houses for the past 21 years, where she is also a member of the Vandalia Houses Tenant Patrol. Even though she lost her eyesight at the age of 100, she still insists on participating. "I have been a member of the Tenant Patrol for the past 15 years and I go down twice a day: once in the morning and again in the afternoon. It's important to me and that's why I never miss a day!"

While not the oldest NYCHA resident, that honor goes to Mary Boatswain of Harlem River Houses, who at age 107 recently took over the title this past May when 112-year-old Yettie Wilson of Vladeck Houses passed away, Ms. Jones is certainly the most active centenarian of public housing and has the distinction of being the oldest member of NYCHA's Tenant Patrol.

Vandalia Avenue Houses consists of two, 10-story buildings exclusively for seniors with 289 apartments housing about 311 residents. Completed May 31, 1983, the 5.88-acre Brooklyn complex is bordered by Louisiana, Vandalia, Georgia and Flatlands Avenues.