

2017

Tree Dedicated in Memory of Sharon Coles-Stewart J.D. '75

David F. Morrill



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By David F. Morrill

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On Saturday, April 22, William & Mary Law School and its Virginia Coastal Policy Center (VCPC) hosted family and friends of the late Sharon Coles-Stewart J.D. '75 to dedicate a memorial tree that was planted at the school in her honor.

The ceremony, appropriately held on Earth Day, took place at the James A. and Robin L. Hixon Center for Experiential Learning and Leadership, new home of the Law School's clinical program. The memorial tree is planted just outside of the Hixon Center.

"Sharon was a believer, daughter, mother, sister, aunt, friend, confidante, counselor of law, and community activist," said Elizabeth Andrews, director of the VCPC. "She touched the lives of so many with her mind, her heart, and her love of humanity."

On hand to thank Coles-Stewart for her service were Youth of the Southeast CARE Coalition, their faces covered in face paint in celebration of Earth Day. Chadra Pittman Walke followed by honoring Coles-Stewart with a libation, a ritual pouring of a liquid in memory of those who have passed on. And family and friends shared many warm memories.

"My mother was certainly an extraordinary woman, and revolutionary, so today on Earth Day as we plant this tree we are proclaiming that we honor her and the torch that has been passed," said her daughter, Lawren Stewart. "Let's continue to carry it with strength, faith, and compassion throughout our generations to come."

The first female African-American graduate of William & Mary Law School, Coles-Stewart died in July 2016, following a distinguished legal career in Hampton Roads. She is fondly remembered by colleagues and all who knew her as a tireless advocate, mentor, and friend.

"Sharon was a real trailblazer... and I loved hearing stories of the impact she had on those who followed her," said Davison M. Douglas, Dean and Arthur B. Hanson Professor of Law. "I think it's appropriate that because education was so very important to her that this tree is planted here, right outside the Law School."



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The tree dedication ceremony was made possible through the generous support of the Virginia Environmental Endowment, with planning assistance from the Coles Family and Southeast CARE Coalition.

About William & Mary Law School

Thomas Jefferson founded William & Mary Law School in 1779 to train leaders for the new nation. Now in its third century, America's oldest law school continues its historic mission of educating citizen lawyers who are prepared both to lead and to serve.