



Legacy Award

John F. Tatum, Sr.

In Sports

John Tatum, Sr. is a native Washingtonian whose love and enthusiasm for sports has gained him local recognition in his senior years. He has always been an active sportsman. Throughout his life he has played and organized sports activities in his local community. As a youth and through adulthood, he played baseball, softball, football, and engaged in swimming. He also gardens, fishes, and snow skis. He became a member of Black Ski, Inc.

He grew up in a segregated Washington, DC. At the time, neither he nor any other African American had access to public pools in the District of Columbia. He taught himself to swim. He used the Potomac River and the C&O Canal to teach himself. On occasion he would wade in the Reflecting Pool at the Lincoln Memorial. Of course, when noticed, he was chased away by the Park Police. Mr. Tatum served in the U.S. Navy from 1944 until 1946. There he taught survival skills in the water with the hopes of becoming a Navy frogman. He was denied that opportunity.

His water-ventures were on hold for many years as he took care of family and raised children. In his mid 70's, he returned to swimming, eager to compete. He began swimming competitively with a local aquatic club. This was no ordinary swim club; it was the Water Wizards, an award-winning aquatic club for seniors. The Water Wizards participate in swim competition as part of Washington DC's Department of Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Tatum, Sr. has competed at the national senior games since 2003. He has won "the gold" at the local and national level. While he has slowed a little from swimming competitively, he remains a vibrant and active community member. Mr. Tatum is a respected figure in his northeast Woodridge community, where he continues to organize activities, tend his garden, and mow his lawn. He is, perhaps, most well-known over the past 35 years for hosting the amazing annual Father's Day Cookout at his home. This occasion brings together the entire community of family, friends, and neighbors.

Mr. Tatum, Sr. is a member of the Liberty Baptist Church where he sings in the Senior Choir and the Men's Chorus and is active in the Senior Circle of the church.