

Wally Higgins, Alfred University professor emeritus, World War II veteran, passes away
8/25/18



ALFRED STATION – Wallace C. “Wally” Higgins, professor emeritus of ceramic design at Alfred University and a World War II veteran who trained with the famed Tuskegee Airmen, passed away Wednesday, Aug. 22, 2018, at Jones Memorial Hospital in Wellsville. He was 92.

Mr. Higgins was born on Nov. 11, 1925, in Kendall, NY, to Daniel R. and Alice S. (Greene) Higgins. On Dec. 10, 1943, in the midst of World War II and before completing high school, Wally entered the United States Army and served until March of 1947. He was assigned to the Army Air Corp and trained with the Tuskegee Airmen. Severe illness prevented him from completing his training and with the conclusion of the war in Europe, he was transferred to the Pacific Theatre where he was stationed in Saipan and Okinawa building roads, airfields, and ammunition storage buildings.

After the war, Wally completed his diploma at Jefferson High School in Rochester and earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in 1952. During his course of studies, he met fellow student, Norma Miller, fell in love, and they were married on Aug. 18, 1951. They spent the next 64 years together until her passing on Dec. 24, 2015.

Wally began his career as a model/mold-maker for Glidden Pottery in Alfred for five years, then became a technical specialist at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. He went on to become an associate professor there, retiring in 1985 as Professor Emeritus.

Wally is survived by a son, Donald (Cathy) Higgins of Livingston County; two daughters, Laurie (Dick) Higgins-Lang of Alfred Station and Sharon (Dan) Stiller of Andover; nine grandchildren, Samantha (Mark) Higgins Tiano and Mellisa (Anthony Saullo) Higgins, both of Saugerties, Sarah (Michael) Higgins-Covel of Fredericksburg, Va., Shanley (Alec) MacCrea of Alfred Station, Casey (Ashley) Keenan of Milford, Conn., Bethany Stiller, Thomas Stiller and Andrew Stiller, all of Andover and Sarah (Marty) Huckabone of Pine Bush; 8 great grandchildren, Mason Tiano, Madisyn Tiano, Brody Covel, Alanna MacCrea, Conall MacCrea, Killian MacCrae, Hudson Keenan and one Huckabone on the way; and a special canine friend, Susie.

In addition to his wife, he was predeceased by a son, Verne Higgins; a brother and World War II casualty, Donald Warner Higgins; and a great granddaughter, Lia Astrid Higgins.

Wally lived a very active and productive life. He was a 50-plus-year member and four-time President of the Alfred Lions Club; a Life Member of the Alfred Station Volunteer Fire Department, Past Chairman of the Allegany County Office for the Aging Advisory Council, and Emeritus and Past President of the Allegany Senior Foundation. He was a longtime member of the Bakers Bridge Historical Society in Alfred Station and was a 64-year member of the Union University Church in Alfred where he served on the Board of Trustees, sang in the choir and was a lay leader.

Together with his wife Norma, he made many overseas trips to places like Egypt, Morocco, Brazil, Sri Lanka, Israel and Zambia, teaching and providing technical assistance in ceramics under the auspices of the International Executive Service Corps. In their retirement years, they held several exhibits together showcasing their custom clocks, sculptures and paintings. They were a wonderful couple and cherished the many years God gave them with each other.

A lifelong teacher at heart, Wally was a great role model and educator and took enormous pride in passing that legacy onto his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. This sense of legacy also presented itself in his golden years as Wally frequently gave talks and presentations to various groups where he discussed his experiences at Tuskegee, his World War II service and his exposure to racial issues.

Visitation will be held on Saturday, Sept. 8, from 1-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. at Baker-Swan Funeral Home, 3256 Riverside Drive in Wellsville. The memorial service will be held on Sunday, Sept. 9, at 2 p.m. at the Union University Church in Alfred with Rev. Laurie DeMott officiating. Full military honors will be rendered at the conclusion of the service. Immediately following the memorial service, Wally's family invites members of the Alfred community to join them for a remembrance reception in Susan Howell Hall on the Alfred University campus.

Wally will be reunited with his wife Norma at a joint burial that will take place in Maplewood Cemetery at the convenience of the family. Online condolences may be offered at www.baker-swan.com.

Wally was very community and civic oriented and devoted a great portion of his life to many local organizations. He was especially involved or benefited from the following organizations: Alfred Lions Club, Alfred Station Volunteer Fire Department, A. E. Crandall Hook & Ladder Ambulance Squad, Allegany County Office for the Aging, Allegany Senior Foundation, Bakers Bridge Historical Society, Union University Church and Alfred University Alumni Association. Memorial contributions in Wally's name would be gratefully accepted from any of these organizations.