

Councilwoman has her day

Hempstead plaza renamed after Goosby

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Hempstead Senior Councilwoman Dorothy Goosby, who fought for voting rights and direct representation of council districts of minority communities, was honored Saturday by state and town officials for her more than 20 years on the board and as its first African American council member.

Goosby, 83, is running for her eighth term on the town board next month. She was the first Democrat elected in nearly a century after a 12-year civil rights lawsuit to create council districts in the town.

Her fellow board members, all Republicans, recognized her by voting to declare Saturday “Dorothy Goosby Day” and to rename the town’s plaza, near Town Hall, for her in a ceremony before nearly 500 people. Elected officials including Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), state Attorney General Letitia James and state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli also were on hand.

Goosby was first elected in 1999 after the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed and declined to hear an appeal to a case she won to eliminate at-large voting in the town and create council districts, including her district of Hempstead and Baldwin, Roosevelt and Uniondale.

“This notes all that happened,” Goosby said. “We all came around to the same point. This is what God needs all of us to do. We work as one board.”

Hempstead Supervisor Don Clavin said the board had planned to rename the plaza for Goosby last year but was halted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Councilwoman Goosby looks past party lines and does so much to show she cares about her residents in her district,” Clavin said. “She is an incredible woman with a story of accomplishment and how we got here.”

Goosby filed a federal lawsuit against the town in 1988 arguing the town’s voting process discriminated against African Americans and minority voters who were surrounded by majority white communities in the town. An Eastern District fed-



Senior Councilwoman Dorothy Goosby, above, and officials outside Hempstead Town Hall on Saturday. At left, the Hempstead icon with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

eral judge ruled in Goosby’s favor and it was later affirmed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, her then-attorney Fred Brewington said Saturday.

Brewington said Judge John Gleeson ordered the town to “dismantle a form of government” by creating six separate council districts.

“It was dogfight,” Brewington said. “What we did learn is that history did not lie. The truth was African Americans had not only been shut out by the town board, but the judge determined there

was a history of discrimination of people of African American descent in Hempstead, the largest town in America.”

Schumer said Goosby was responsible for thousands of African American officials who would not have been elected to office without her.

He recounted how she came to New York from the segregated South in Florida and became involved in politics when she challenged the town. Her case has been cited 150 times in federal court cases.

“Dorothy never stood for injus-

tice in her own story or the story of anyone else,” Schumer said. “She saw an institutional wrong and bigotry and worked to right that wrong so voices of people of color could be heard in Hempstead so local government could more accurately reflect who lived and worked here.”

James said Goosby was a role model like Rosa Parks and John Lewis, who fought for civil rights and justice for discriminated voters. She said the “march to justice is far from complete,” and Goosby gives her inspiration and an obligation to serve.

“I stand on her shoulders. I would not be in this position, but for Dorothy Goosby,” James said. “Because of Dorothy Goosby, the Hempstead Council started to look more like Hempstead. Those who were invisible and can’t speak now have a voice and they spoke through Dorothy Goosby. The ground shook and the glass ceiling was shattered.”

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