



Dr. James Bazell Stafford Jr.

September 16, 1921 - May 5, 2023

Dr. James Bazell Stafford, Jr., 101, of Peoria, IL, transitioned from this earthly life to his heavenly home at 1:11 pm, on Friday, May 5, 2023, at Carle Health Methodist Hospital.

Dr. Stafford was born on September 16, 1921, in Alton, Illinois, to James and Mary Jane (Killion) Stafford, Sr. He married the love of his life, Evelyn Serena Smith in St. Louis, Missouri, on December 13, 1943.

Dr. Stafford was an optometrist for over 60 years and owned his private practice, Dr. James B. Stafford, Optometrist, in Peoria, Illinois, for 50 years from 1953, retiring in 2003. He was a U.S. Army Veteran serving in World War II where he was an Adjutant at the 335th Station Hospital located in Burma, a country in Southeast Asia. Dr. Stafford also served in the Korean Conflict where he practiced optometry in the hospital there. He attended Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, and Iowa Wesleyan College in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where he was an outstanding football player. He earned his Optometry Degree at Monroe College of Optometry, Chicago, Illinois, now known as Illinois College of Optometry.

Dr. Stafford was a trailblazer and opened the door for other African Americans in Peoria. In 1959 he became the first African American to hold a seat on the Peoria City Council. He was appointed by a 5 to 2 vote after the council deadlocked on six previous ballots. This was such a mighty accomplishment at this time that it was covered by Jet Magazine in the April 30 and May 7, 1959, weekly magazine. He also became the first African American to serve as president of the Illinois Optometric Association which he held for two years. In addition to tennis as an activity, he was also a talented photographer and also rode a Honda Motorcycle until he turned 80 years of age. Another hobby of his was designing and crafting stained glass windows. His beautiful, skillful stained-glass designs adorn both his home and his church, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

He earned the rank of Eagle Scout as a teenager and started the first boy scout Troop, Troop 19, at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. Dr. Stafford was also awarded the

Distinguished Scouter Award. He also travelled by car with his wife and two children to attend Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico, the training center for scouting. To assist in helping those in need, Dr. Stafford was instrumental in starting the food bank at Mt. Zion, which is still operating today. Dr. Stafford was a member of Mt. Zion M.B. Church for over 60 years where he also served as a Deacon and Trustee.

Dr. Stafford was an avid tennis player, participating in many tennis tournaments throughout Peoria and the surrounding counties and he won many tournaments. He played tennis until he turned 94 years of age and beat many players many years younger than he. The life of Dr. Stafford was put to paper in a book titled Topspin, the story of Dr. James Bazell Stafford, Jr. written by his son James B. Stafford, III, to honor his father's life of giving to his family, his community, and his church.

Dr. Stafford leaves to cherish their most precious memories his loving wife of 79 years of marriage, Evelyn Serena Smith Stafford; one son, James B. (Melanie) Stafford, III of Memphis, TN; one daughter, Sylvia Victoria (Ernest, Jr.) Thompson of Detroit, MI; four grandchildren; five great grandchildren and a host of other family and friends who miss and love him. He was preceded in death by his parents.

Funeral services will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 27, 2023, at Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church with a visitation one-hour prior at 10 a.m. Rev. James Flemming will officiate. Dr. Stafford will be laid to rest on Soldier Hill at Historic Springdale Cemetery where U.S. Army Military Honors will be rendered.

Simons Mortuary has been entrusted with arrangements. Online condolences may be made at SimonsMortuary.com.

Cemetery Details

Historic Springdale Cemetery

3014 N. Prospect Road
Peoria, IL 61603

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 27. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church
305 S. MADISON PARK TERRACE
Peoria, IL 61605
(309) 674-4379

Funeral Service

MAY 27. 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM (CT)

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church
305 S. MADISON PARK TERRACE
Peoria, IL 61605
(309) 674-4379

Tribute Wall



“ *Simons Mortuary created a Tribute Video in memory of Dr. James Bazell Stafford Jr.*



Simons Mortuary - June 05, 2023 at 12:33 PM



“ *Simons Mortuary created a Tribute Video in memory of Dr. James Bazell Stafford Jr.*



Simons Mortuary - May 24, 2023 at 05:29 PM

GB

Awesome, Jimmy

Gwen Brown - May 27, 2023 at 10:42 AM



“ *1 file added to the album Dr. Stafford, Jr. Burial at Springdale Cemetery*



Simons Mortuary - June 05, 2023 at 12:32 PM

DM

“ My condolences to the family of Dr. Stafford. Although having met him once, I never knew him, but read about his ground breaking work as the first African American on the Peoria City Council, at a time when that seemed out of reach. Myself being the first African American female elected to the council, I researched Dr. Stafford to gain an insight into the struggles he addressed. I pray that I made him proud during my tenure there. Dr. Stafford will stand as an example of how to achieve what some believe is the impossible. God Bless you Dr. Stafford and may your family continue to receive the Lords blessing. Denise Moore (Peoria City Council 2013 -2021).

Denise Moore - May 27, 2023 at 12:02 PM

MW

“ Ms. Ward lit a candle in memory of James Stafford



Ms. Pat Ward - May 25, 2023 at 08:46 PM



“ Medium Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Dr. James Bazell Stafford Jr..



May 24, 2023 at 01:31 PM

CJ

“ Rest in Peace Dr. Stafford. You have been blessed to live a full life of 101 years. Thank you for your service to our country and the first of many accomplishments. Thank you for being a door opener for may to come behind you. A close friend of our family for many years when our parents came to Peoria and started their lives. The connection that was had with the love of looking out for each other. You were our father's eye doctor under the care of the VA. You have lived a full life and it is time to rest. Prayers to the family and Mrs. Stafford. We know both James and Sylvia with their families will take the best of care for her. You will be missed. The Johnson Family

Cindy Johnson - May 23, 2023 at 04:27 PM

FM

“ *My mentor, guide, advisor and confidant and a great friend will be missed deeply. I know you will be forever in God's heavenly care .*



Floyd March - May 23, 2023 at 12:59 PM

CD

“ *Cassandra Dixon-Nazzal lit a candle in memory of James Stafford*



Cassandra Dixon-Nazzal - May 20, 2023 at 07:31 PM

MS

“ *Your father accomplished a lot. First, to your father, thank you for your service. My father, Julien Sierra, served as a Sargent in the Army in the European Theater...specifically, the Battle of the Bulge. Secondly, my condolences to you and yours. May the God of peace and love...and forgiveness...bless you, now, and forever, Amen.*

Mary Sierra - May 20, 2023 at 12:59 PM

BC

“ *Brenda Cayson lit a candle in memory of James Stafford*



Brenda (Rudd) Cayson - May 20, 2023 at 10:56 AM

AA

“ *My sincere condolences to you and your family. May your sweet memories provide comfort during this difficult time.*
Annette Alexander

Annette Alexander - May 18, 2023 at 01:10 PM

DR

“ *Condolences to your family at this moment of loss.*
Dr. Irving W. Robinson



Dr.Irving ROBINSON - May 18, 2023 at 10:19 AM

LJ

“ *Lisa Jones lit a candle in memory of James Stafford*



Lisa Jones - May 16, 2023 at 10:38 AM

B(

“ *Brenda (Rudd) lit a candle in memory of James Stafford*



Brenda Cayson (Rudd) - May 12, 2023 at 02:43 PM

RW

“ *Richard Theresa Walker sent a virtual gift in memory of James Stafford*



Richard and Theresa Walker - May 10, 2023 at 05:00 PM

MH

Deep Condolences to the Stamford Family 🙏

Malcolm Hunt - May 18, 2023 at 09:33 AM

PJ

“ To a Godly man who took care of his wife, Mrs Stafford. Everytime Mrs Stafford would come to the beauty Salon, Mr Stanford Would walk her inside the the salon and vice versa picking her up from the salon. Oh and the white horse mustang that Dr Stafford was still driving at his older age. He truly was a energetic man. Rest on Dr Stafford. Mrs Stafford will be taken care just like you had taken care of her. You will be missed by all who knew you. Rest in Peace!

Pamela johnson - May 10, 2023 at 08:38 AM

BA

To the Stafford Family,
My condolences to you and your family Jimmy, may the the Lord Jesus be with you!!!




Brother Gary O. DeBerry Sr. KAPPA Alpha - May 19, 2023 at 11:42 PM

RM

“ Dr Stafford was my eye Dr when I was a child on second street if I recall.
RIP great Dr.

Rochelle Moore - May 09, 2023 at 10:40 PM

GG

“ Well done Doc Stafford. You lived a full life and you had a memorable effect on the Civil rights in Peoria and being the first in many achievements in you life. You & Evelyn supported me when I returned to Peoria 3 yrs ago for my book signing. I did purchase your story in Topspin which is rich in accomplishments. Take your rest Doc.  my condolences & love to Evelyn, James, Sylvia & grands. Geraldine & Ted Godfrey, Arlington TX

Geraldine Godfrey - May 09, 2023 at 06:00 PM

PJ

We'll miss Mr. Stafford. You definitely took care of Mrs. Stafford when you both were 100 years old. You became slow but did your best

Pamela johnson - May 09, 2023 at 07:29 PM

DP

Jim and Melanie:
Much prayer and love cover you during this difficult time--may precious memories and the comfort of the Holy Spirit bring you peace and joy.
Much Love to You,

Deborah and Jonya Pratcher

Deborah Pratcher - May 19, 2023 at 08:01 PM

JH

Jim, the Hunt family share with you, your mother and sister the loss of her husband and your father. I have been impressed with your father since I met him years ago and the stories and information that you have shared with me. I trust that with the passing of time and the many memories that you all have that tomorrow will be better. There is a major void in Peoria. Safe travels and Keep Hope Alive!

*Sincerely,
The Hunt Family*

john hunt - May 25, 2023 at 09:06 PM