

# The Clerk's Black History Series



## Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



## Alexa Irene Canady

(November 7, 1950 - )

"First African-American Neurosurgeon"

"First African-American Pediatric Neurosurgeon"



**Alexa Irene Canady** was born November 7, 1950, outside of Lansing, MI. Her mother, Elizabeth Hortense (Golden) Canady, was a civil rights leader and the first African-American elected to the Lansing Board of Education, as well as national president of Delta Sigma Theta sorority from 1983-1988. Alexa's father, Dr. Clinton Canady, Jr., was a dentist. As a child, Alexa and her younger brother were taught the importance of education and hard work.



Alexa excelled academically, both in the classroom and on tests scores, earning a National Achievement Scholar nomination. In 1967, she graduated from high school with honors and entered the University of Michigan. In her junior year, she attended a summer program for minority students, working in a genetics lab, sparking her interest in the field of medicine. She pledged Delta Sigma Theta and graduated with a B.A. in Zoology — just as her mother had done. She attended the University of Michigan Medical School, where she developed her love of the study of neurology. In 1975, she graduated Medical school, cum laude, and became a surgical intern at the Yale - New Haven Hospital until 1976. After training in general surgery at Yale, Alexa was accepted to a neurosurgical residency at the University of Minnesota. There she found her true calling—in the pediatric ward. After completing her residency in 1981, she decided to specialize in pediatric neurosurgery, becoming the first African-American and the first woman to do so. In 1984, Alexa Irene Canady became the first African-American, board-certified Neurosurgeon. She practiced for a short time at the Henry Ford Hospital before transferring to the Children's Hospital of Michigan.



Dr. Alexa Canady was chief of neurosurgery at the Children's Hospital of Michigan from 1987 until June 2001. During this time, she also served as a Professor of Neurosurgery with Wayne State University, in Detroit.

Over the years, Dr. Canady has received numerous professional recognitions, including *Children's Hospital of Michigan's - Teacher of the Year* award in 1984, being inducted into the Michigan Woman's Hall of Fame in 1989, being named *Woman of the Year* by the American Women's Medical Association in 1993 and in 1994, earning the *Distinguished Service Award* from Wayne State University Medical School. She holds two honorary degrees: a doctorate of humane letters from the University of Detroit - Mercy, awarded in 1997, and a doctor of science degree from the University of Southern Connecticut, awarded in 1999. In 2002, the Detroit News named Dr. Canady "Michigander of the Year."

Dr. Canady retired and moved to Pensacola, Florida in 2001. However, after discovering the need for a pediatric neurosurgeon in the area, she joined the staff of the Sacred Heart Hospital, as a part-time surgeon and consultant and remained there until her actual retirement in 2012.

