

Activist Co-Founded Arlington Housing Corp.

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Jennie Davis, 84, one of the founders of the Arlington Housing Corp., which works to improve housing in the Nauck community in Arlington County, died July 30 at the Cherrydale nursing home in Arlington, where she lived. She had Alzheimer's disease.



A new housing complex in Arlington is to be named for Jennie Davis. (Family Photo)

In the early 1970s, shortly after Mrs. Davis retired from a decade of work in the payroll department at Fort Myer, a real estate agent refused to show her family a home for sale in a white neighborhood because the Davises were black, she told friends.

Mrs. Davis took her outrage to the County Board, insisting that it make affordable housing a priority in the county.

Her family moved to the historically black community of Nauck, founded before the Civil War by freed blacks. Mrs. Davis helped found what became the Arlington Housing Corp., which has helped more than 1,000 low-income and moderate-income families renovate or buy houses in Arlington.

For more than 20 years, Mrs. Davis was president of the Nauck Civic Association. She and her husband wrote and produced 1,000 copies of the Nauck newsletter every month. She was also influential in creating the housing group's home improvement programs, the organization said.

"The civic association and [the housing organization] have developed a partnership that's enabled people to get their homes renovated and try to help families stay in the community," she said in 1990. "Our aim has been to preserve the housing we have here and to build moderate housing in the area."

A new affordable housing complex in Arlington is scheduled to be named in her honor.

In 1986, Mrs. Davis was named one of three winners of the Metropolitan Volunteer Activist Award, sponsored by the Volunteer Clearinghouses of the Washington Metropolitan Area.

Jennie Covington was born in Baltimore and moved to Northern Virginia about 1963. She was a member of Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Arlington and was active in the local Democratic party.

Her first husband, Penny Donahue, died in the late 1950s. Her second husband, James A. Davis, died in 2002.

Survivors include two stepdaughters, Carolyn Cross of Alexandria and Latonya Powell of Fort Washington; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.