# **ROLE MODEL AWARDS NOMINATION FACT SHEET**

**NAME:** Doris M. Femenella, M.A., S Ed.

**FAMILY:**

Doris is married to Robert V. Femenella who is a School Psychologist with Clark County School District and a Marriage and Family Therapist in private practice. The couple have three children: Ruthann, Renee, and Rachelle. They also have five grandchildren: Lauren, Robert, Sean, Theo and Selene. Doris was born to James Irvin and Lavina, Francis Jones in Brooklyn, New York. There were seven children in the Jones family: Irvin Jr., Antoinette, Junius, John, Doris, Thomas and Ruth. Nieces and nephews include Senora, Laverne, Wayman. Great nieces and nephews include Mathew, Jayson and Dia.

**PERSONAL QUALITIES**:

Nevada Attorney General Del Papa stated in her direction for nominating persons for the award in question, “The Women’s Role Model Awards seeks to honor women in our state who have actively worked to better the lives of others through their contribution of time, energy, devotion, spirit and community activism.” One could not have described Doris Femenella better. As we will see, her motto, *“Progress is my most important product!”* has been the hallmark of her life despite what would seem to many to be insurmountable obstacles.

Doris was born to a struggling Black family during a time when persons of color were segregated and not allowed the same privileges afforded white Americans. The family moved to Malverne, LI, New York when Doris was in elementary school. They lived on a five-acre farm where all members of the family had to contribute to make ends meet. Despite numerous hardships including walking miles to school, Doris soon distinguished herself by being an excellent student. In High School she received awards for: being an outstanding scholar, having perfect attendance, athletics, and art. In fact, Doris was the only female in the history of Malverne High to ever receive the Gold Key in Athletics.

When Doris graduated from Malverne with Honors, she was filled with ambition and a desire to further her education. Her love was medicine. When she approached her family with the idea of going to college she was told there was barely enough money to live. If the boys in the family wanted to go to school, some way would be found to try and help, but this was not the lot of a young woman, especially not a young woman of African American ancestry.

Determined to let nothing stand in her way, Doris applied to New York University and was accepted to the pre-med program. She worked three jobs to support herself and pay her school bills. A daily choice was, “Do I walk to where I have to go today or do I eat lunch?” In addition to keeping up with her scholastic requirements and working she found time to play on the NYU women’s basketball team as well as play semi-professional ball for the New York Knicks female team.

It soon became apparent that aspiring to become a doctor was not an opportunity available to young black women unless their families were of significant means and they were “the right color”. Doris switched to Physical Education and graduated with honors. She went on to achieve a Master’s Degree in Educational Administration. She later went on to achieve an endorsement as a Chief School Officer from the State of New York by furthering her post graduate work at St. Johns University (S.Ed.) Jobs in education were not readily available to African Americans, so Doris did post graduate work in Marketing and Retailing, which led to a sales job with Macy’s department store.

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Despite her degrees, Caucasian co-workers with high school diplomas were promoted to “white flower” executive positions over her. Undaunted, Doris continued to persevere until she achieved her “white flower”.

While working at Macy’s, an opportunity to teach became available in a school that was experimenting with integration in Scarsdale, New York. She also availed herself of an opportunity to teach Physical Education on a University level. After a short period of time, Doris was hired as an elementary school teacher by the Westbury, NY School District; however, the indignities common to Black Americans did not stop. Promotions were given to others with far less education than Doris. Finally, in 1967, Doris was appointed Assistant Principal of an elementary school. The next year, civil unrest gripped the nation and Doris was moved up to the High School as “Dean of Negro Girls”. Realizing what an affront this was, the Board of Education soon changed Doris’ title to Assistant Principal and then to Co-Principal, which role she held until her retirement in 1982 when she moved to Nevada.

Even though she had put in a full career working for the betterment of others, Doris immediately began giving of herself again by establishing the Green Valley Community Association. This proved to be the beginning of a new “career” of working tirelessly with organization after organization in an attempt to make things better for all Nevadans, including the youth to which she has given her life. The previous page listing her accomplishments and volunteerism is by no means an exhaustive list. And now, nineteen years after adopting Nevada as her home, Doris continues to serve and give. Role model for young women? Given her history, I can think of none better. Her daughters have followed her footsteps, and she had hoped America’s young would do so as well. Nevada is a better place to live because of Doris Femenella.