



# City of Chicago



R2021-163

Office of the City Clerk

## Document Tracking Sheet

**Meeting Date:** 2/26/2021  
**Sponsor(s):** Dowell (3)  
**Type:** Resolution  
**Title:** Tribute to late Nathaniel Thomas  
**Committee(s) Assignment:**

**RESOLUTION HONORING THE LIFE OF NATHANIEL “NATE” THOMAS,  
CHERISHED ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ADMINISTRATOR**

**WHEREAS**, Nathaniel “Nate” Thomas, father, grandfather, uncle, brother, trailblazer, and lifelong educator, passed away on November 7, 2020; and

**WHEREAS**, The Chicago City Council has been informed of Nathaniel’s passing by the Honorable Pat Dowell, Alderman of the 3rd Ward; and

**WHEREAS**, Nate was born in Mound Bayou, Mississippi on February 26, 1936; he moved to Chicago as a young child and graduated from Wendell Phillips High School; and

**WHEREAS**, During his time attending Fisk University, Nate was a singer in the John Work Chorale, captain of the baseball team, and played basketball, before temporarily leaving school and joining the United States Marines Corps, where he served as a corporal; and

**WHEREAS**, While serving in the Marines, Nate was also the bass singer with the Four Palms, a music group that made history as the first African American group to win the worldwide All-Navy Talent Show; the Four Palms also performed on the Ed Sullivan Show twice; and

**WHEREAS**, Nate went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Technology and a Master of Arts in Vocational Guidance from Roosevelt University, and a PhD in Higher Education Administration from LaSalle University; and

**WHEREAS**, In 1965, while still a student at Roosevelt University, Nate started working at Illinois Tech in the campus computer center before he was promoted to Assistant Director of Co-Op education where he focused on recruiting and supporting students from communities underrepresented within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields; Nate’s efforts resulted in a 433% increase in underrepresented students in his first year alone; and

**WHEREAS**, To further his mission in recruiting underrepresented students, Nate established the Early ID Program in 1974, a summer-long program that brought high-potential local students from Chicago area high schools to campus to expose them to the world of engineering, computer science, architecture, and medicine; due to his innovative vision and approach, Nate was named Director of Admissions that same year; and

**WHEREAS**, After serving as the executive director for the Committee on Institutional Cooperation and the Midwest Programs for Minorities in Engineering from 1977 to 1980, Nate returned to Illinois Tech to serve as the Head of Minority Affairs, where he further expanded technical and scientific education opportunities within African-American communities in Chicago and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships; through Nate’s efforts, Illinois Tech graduated 97 Black engineers in 1982, the most in the country regardless of university size; Nate retired from Illinois Tech as Assistant Vice President of External Affairs in 1988; and

**WHEREAS**, Under Nate’s tenure, Illinois Tech saw the recruitment of hundreds of talented Black and Latinx students on campus who went on to have distinguished careers and make significant contributions in the technology, computer science, and engineering industries – some of whom even went on to hold senior leadership positions in Fortune 100 corporations; and

**WHEREAS**, Throughout his distinguished career, Nate was the recipient of numerous awards and honors including the Reginald H. Jones Distinguished Service Award from the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering in 1983 and the Golden Torch Legacy Award from the National Society of Black Engineers in 2011; Nate was honored at the "Nate Thomas Tribute", a three-day event held on the Illinois Tech campus and attended by over 200 guests, and Illinois Tech alumni raised money to the launch the Nate Thomas Legacy Scholarship in 2015; and

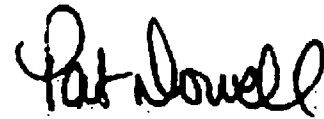
**WHEREAS**, Nate was also appointed by the Mayor of Chicago to serve as Chancellor of Student Services for City Colleges of Chicago and served as the Vice Chancellor for student services in the Chicago community college system; and

**WHEREAS**, Nate was preceded in death by his parents Aaron and Marie Thomas; his daughter, Taunda Thomas; and two brothers, Aaron (Brown) Thomas, and Jerry Thomas; and is survived by his five children, Rhonda Thomas, Barbara (BJ) Thomas, Dwayne Thomas, Jennifer Chalmers, and Susan Thomas Smith; 12 grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; four nieces; two nephews; and a host of friends, relatives, and mentees he affectionately called "my students"; and

**WHEREAS**, The City of Chicago, along with the students, faculty, and staff (past and present) of Illinois Tech, wishes to honor the life and legacy of Nate Thomas and the indelible impact he made on the lives of hundreds of students throughout his career; now, therefore,

**BE IT RESOLVED**, That we, the Mayor and members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled this twenty-fourth day of February, 2021, do hereby wish to honor the life of Nathaniel "Nate" Thomas, and extend our most heartfelt condolences to Nathaniel's family and friends; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the family of Nathaniel "Nate" Thomas as a sign of our honor and respect.



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PAT DOWELL  
Alderman, 3rd Ward