

B/w Allen, Gilbert

National Library of Jamaica



The Daily Observer Tuesday May 11, 2010. (1)

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**Mandeville, Manchester - Custos
of Mandeville, Gilbert Allen, is a
disciple of volunteerism.**

For over forty (40) years, even while working as full time medical director attached to the bauxite/alumina company, Alpart at Nain in St Elizabeth, he has found time to provide his surgical skills free of cost to local hospitals.

Medicine apart, Dr Allen is committed to social and community activism, striving to improve the lives of those around him through avenues such as the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Kiwanis Club and as a "citizen".

"There is a great need for volunteerism in Jamaica," he explains simply.



That proven commitment to fellow man and community no doubt explains his "surprise" appointment as Custos back in 1994 within months of being made a Justice of the Peace.

"I have always wondered why someone would select me as Custos," says a modest Allen. Now at age 81, he still believes he has much to contribute, particularly as it relates to evolving plans to ease congestion at the heart of Mandeville. Close to his heart is the plan to move court trials out of the town to a proposed "justice complex" on 40 acres of land provided by Alpart, close to Spur Tree, just west of Mandeville.

Allen who played a lead role in securing the land, visualises a centre that would also serve as regional courts for St Elizabeth and Clarendon. The site, he suggests, could also accommodate the

Area Three police headquarters and the army barracks relocated from Mandeville.

He looks to the day when the market which he believes has "long outlived its time" at the centre of Mandeville is moved to a more suitable location. Additionally, he advocates the relocation from the town centre of the Mandeville Primary and Junior High School which he believes has become "unsafe for our children".

Allen was born in Knockpatrick, south-central Manchester on the 25th of March 1929 - one of four children for James and Jane Allen. His father was a tailor by trade who "did a little farming on the side" and his mother a fulltime housewife. All four (4) children went to Bethabara Elementary where Gilbert followed in the footsteps of his older brother Cedric as a consistent high achiever.

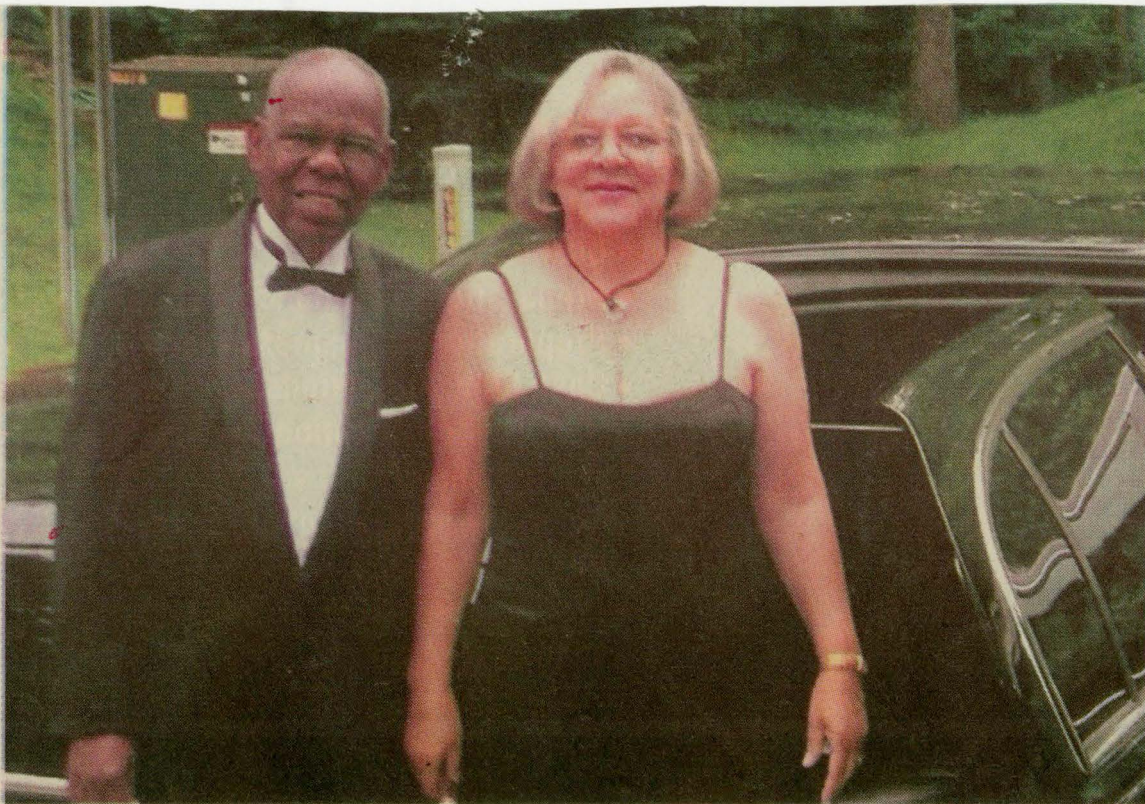
"Aged up" from elementary school at age 16 and having successfully completed the first, secondary and third year Jamaica exams, Allen followed his brother to the prestigious Manchester School (now Manchester High).

Located then where the Mandeville bus park now stands, Manchester School was predominantly attended by the children of the elite - mostly white and light skinned. Allen emphasises that he never experienced "colour or racial prejudice" during his two years there.

He recalls that "affordability was not easy; my parents had some difficulty". But for his parents it turned out to be hard-earned cash well spent. Allen excelled and like his older brother, developed a yearning for the medical profession.

He followed Cedric's footsteps to the

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A LIFE OF SERVICE...

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United States and enrolled in the premedical course at what is now Andrews University. Back then it was Emmanuel Missionary College -chosen by the Allens because it was a Seventh Day Adventist with close links to West Indies College in Mandeville, now the Northern Caribbean University. Like his brother, Gilbert worked his way through the four (4) years at Emmanuel Missionary, peeling potatoes, and washing pots, pans and plates for six hours each day. His Bachelor's degree earned him a place at the highly sought after Howard University in Washington DC, then the leading medical training institution for blacks in America.

Again the young Allen resorted to wage-earning work to sustain his studies, graduating as a medical doctor after four years. A year's internship and four years of intensive surgical training followed at hospitals in Ohio and California.

His training as a surgeon

complete, Allen worked for a year and a half at the Kaiser Hospital on the Sunset Strip in Hollywood. Then though he says he was "not yet ready" to return home, Allen was eventually enticed back by Kaiser Industries, then rapidly developing the bauxite/alumina industry in Jamaica.

He took charge as medical director at the brand new Alpart plant in 1968 and was with them until 1985 when the plant was closed for the first time because of a downturn in the metals market. Trained as a surgeon, Allen by way of courses and on-the-job experience, updated himself in industrial medicine to cope with the challenges of the bauxite/alumina sector.

But his surgical skills were not abandoned. Allen negotiated a deal with his employers for time to work free of cost at local hospitals including Mandeville Regional, Percy Junor and Black River. For several years through the late 60s to 70s, he was the leading surgeon at Mandeville Regional. In the same period he also worked as a private consultant at Hargreaves Memorial.

With the closure of Alpart, Allen went into private practice developing Consolidated Health Services Ltd. With the reopening of Alpart, in 1989 he resumed medical services to the bauxite/alumina plant but this time under the banner of his company. The arrangement continued until Alpart's second closure in 2009.

He carries fond memories of Alpart, insisting that the plant's investment in health services to its employees should be a "good example for Jamaican companies". And as to the complaints of environmental hazards posed by bauxite mining and alumina processing, Allen insists that the situation is overstated.

Exhaustive tests had shown that "bauxite/alumina dust (pose) nuisances and are not particularly injurious", he said. Allen hailed his wife Georgia Delores for her support over "many years" of marriage.

"I am a lucky man, lucky to have married the wife that I did," he says. The couple produced a son and daughter and are now grandparents of four.

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