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George Phelps Jr., Anne Arundel County's first black officer, dies

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George Phelps Jr., Anne Arundel County's first black law enforcement officer and longtime advertisement community activist, died this morning, friends said. He was in his late 80s.

In the 1950s, Phelps had applied for jobs as a police officer with Anne Arundel County and Annapolis police. But he was told that African Americans need not apply. So he did not become a police officer, but met with then-Sheriff Joseph W. Alton Jr. and got a job as a deputy sheriff.

He held the job for 25 years and retired in 1976. While in the department, he created and served as chief of a Special Deputies Unit of African Americans, which at one point had 250 members. In 1963, Phelps was part of the security detail for Rev. Martin Luther King Jr's March on Washington, according to *The Capital* archives.

No further details were available about his death Thursday, but he had been sick for some time. "George was a very important community leader," said Carl Snowden, Annapolis civil rights leader. "He was very active in the community ... He will be sorely missed."

Over the years, Phelps had been honored with various awards, including a Public Service Award from the North County Political Forum and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Anne Arundel County Democratic Central Committee. In 2013, Middle Street in Parole was changed to George and Marion Phelps Lane, in honor of Phelps and his wife, who died in 2010.

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