



## Harry Sims Downs

October 5, 1925 - January 3, 2017

Harry Sims Downs, 91, Chancellor Emeritus of the University System of Georgia, founding president and President Emeritus of Clayton State University died peacefully at home on January 3 after a brief illness. He was born to Mae Belle Sims and Louis Charles Downs on October 5, 1925, in Conyers, Georgia. He is survived by his beloved wife, Melba Kicklighter Downs; daughters Nancy Rambin (Alan), Rebecca Williams (Kevin), Harriet Ike (David); and grandchildren Austin (Dana), Adam, and Andrew Rambin; Johnson (Amy), Zachary, Kathleen, and Harrison Williams; John David, Anna, Hampton and Anders Ike.

A service celebrating Harry's life will be held Saturday, January 7, 2017, 11:00 AM, at the Conyers Presbyterian Church. In lieu of flowers the family has asked that donations be made to either Conyers Presbyterian Church Harry Downs Memorial Fund or The Clayton State University Foundation to Benefit Spivey Hall, 2000 Clayton State Blvd., Morrow, GA 30260.

In December of 1943, Harry earned his junior college diploma from North Georgia College and was honored as the Outstanding Cadet Officer. He then reached his goal of attaining his Naval Aviator Wings before his 21st birthday. During World War II he served in the Pacific Theater as a Navy Air Corps fighter pilot, Hellrazor Bombing Squadron Eighty-One, aboard the aircraft carrier USS Princeton. Hence, the lifelong passion and love for flying was born. After the war, Harry continued his education at the University of Georgia, earning a B.S.Ed. in mathematics and science in 1949 and a M.Ed. in 1950.

Harry was awarded an Ed. D. from Michigan State University in 1962. Clayton State University honored Dr. Downs with an honorary doctorate in 2010.

Devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and academic excellence, Harry began his career as a teacher/counselor at Crawford County High School in Roberta, Georgia, and in the summers 1951-1961 as interim instructor at both University of Georgia and Michigan State University.

A visionary in his field, Harry worked as a consultant for the California Testing Bureau 1955-1960 where he guided and helped set the standards for schools and colleges throughout the southeastern states. He joined the University System of Georgia in the capacity of Associate Director of Guidance and Testing and Director of Junior College Operations. He was then appointed Assistant Vice Chancellor, where, among other things, he worked to create a seamless evolution from junior college credit transfer to senior colleges throughout the system.

As 1969 came to a close, Harry was approached by then Chancellor George Simpson about the planning and building of a junior college in Morrow, Georgia. Harry played an instrumental role in every facet of the operation from building techniques to landscape planning. With a passion for student achievement, he led the college community. Under President Harry Downs's leadership, Clayton State University (as it is currently known) established a four- year nursing program, a stellar continuing education program, a successful athletic program, and the world renowned concert venue, Spivey Hall.

Harry retired to his beloved community, Conyers, Georgia, where his passion for education continued. He remained a member of The Ty Cobb Education Foundation and The Walter and Emilie Spivey Foundation until his death. Harry fulfilled a lifetime of goals and achievements. He truly lived a wonderful life.

Condolences may be submitted on-line at [www.scotward.com](http://www.scotward.com). Scot Ward Funeral Services, 699 American Legion Road, Conyers, GA 30012, 770-483-7216.



# Previous Events

## Service

JAN 7. 11:00 AM (ET)

Conyers Presbyterian Church  
911 N. Main Street  
Conyers, GA 30012

# Tribute Wall



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Harry Sims Downs.*



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January 20, 2017 at 10:31 AM



“ *To the Downs family,  
Dr. Downs hired me for my first teaching job at Clayton Junior College in 1976 and I will be forever grateful to him. I recently retired from there. He and his wife were such nice people. I am sorry I wasn't able to attend the funeral but I know his influence will be felt by many, many people. I pray for peace and comfort for the family.  
Sincerely,  
Katrina Barnes*

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**Katrina Barnes** - January 10, 2017 at 06:38 AM

CF

“ To the Family & Friends of Dr. Harry Downs,

*I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Downs on one occasion. It was through his nurse, Charlene. He was delightful and witty!*

*I pray God's peace and the comfort of His Holy Spirit upon each of you as you mourn. I also hope that, most of all, you will rejoice in a life well lived and upon the prospects of seeing him again when Jesus shall return! Blessings to you all!*

*~Crystal Fisher*

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**Crystal Fisher** - January 07, 2017 at 07:28 PM

EM

“ When I was appointed in 1973 as a faculty member and Chair of the Division of Humanities at Clayton Junior College. Dr. Harry S. Downs was beginning his fifth year as President of the College. For the following twenty-one years, it was my challenging and joyous privilege to serve on his faculty and as a member of his administrative staff. Much of what we admire about Clayton State today is a direct result of the foundation he laid as its founding president. He was unique among leaders of higher education. It was his passion to provide an environment where students could grow intellectually and morally. His commitment to the achievement of excellence in all that he did was unswerving, and he expected no less from those of us whom he considered his colleagues. He was always our inspiration and our cherished model.

*He considered his opportunity to lead an institution of higher education as a matter of sacred trust, and viewed each of his accomplishments as an opportunity to set and achieve a higher goal. Long before the assessment of students' ability to demonstrate desired learning outcomes became a major thrust of higher education, it was a guiding principle of his agenda. It was at the core of his sacred trust, and still today many Clayton faculty will tell you that this emphasis of our founding president taught them to place a higher value on their role of helping students to grow and learn.*

*We all have come to love and appreciate Spivey Hall. Spivey Hall is what it is today because of two people who were there as it began. First, it was a well thought out dream in the mind of Emilie Spivey. Then, it became the crowning focus of Dr. Down's passion for excellence. He treasured having Emilie as his guide during the last four years of her life when, under his leadership the plans for Spivey Hall were developed. Then following her death, he continued to work diligently to ensure that the design and development of the Albert Schweitzer Memorial Organ were precisely what she would have wanted.*

*We will all miss President Downs, but we can still find him if we look carefully enough. Just go to Clayton State and take a walk along one of the time-honored pathways, stand outside a classroom and listen as students engage in a spirited discussion, or spend an evening in Spivey Hall. You'll see!*

*Elliott W. McElroy  
Professor of Philosophy and Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Emeritus  
Clayton State University*

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**Elliott McElroy** - January 07, 2017 at 05:24 PM

RM

“ *A great man who loved his community. I will miss your, sincere friendship, sense of humor, your insight and wisdom you gave me all of these years.*

*Randy Mills*

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**Randy Mills** - January 07, 2017 at 07:36 AM

JS

“ *Harry has been a long time friend and counselor. Quick with a laugh and a smile He always was generous with his time and advice. A true Statesman and Educator He will truly be missed by all. Our love and prayers for peace and comfort for the family. Jim and Nancy Shipp*

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**Jim Shipp** - January 06, 2017 at 07:20 PM

KI

“ Harry welcomed us as his neighbor, with open arms. He was generous and had a great sense of humor.

*Wishing the family, peace to bring you comfort and courage to face the days ahead.*

*Bobby & Kiona Peters*

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**kiona** - January 06, 2017 at 05:39 PM

BS

“ Doctor D, I treasured your friendship and am VERY saddend by your untimely passing You just don't know how muuch YOU and Your family meant to me and my family and how much I'll miss you on my frequent visits we had and enjoyed. You were always a wealth of knowledge and NEVER complained, your tenacity and love of life is something I will miss very much. You will always have special place in my life and in my heart. You inspired me in many ways and YOU were MY MENTOR!!!!!!!!!!!!!! The Spivey Family "SPEED"

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**BILL SPIVEY** - January 06, 2017 at 02:59 PM

FL

“ Fred L. purchased a sympathy card for the family of Harry Sims Downs.



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**Fred L.** - January 06, 2017 at 02:26 PM

TD

“ On behalf of Clayton State Athletics, we offer our sincerest condolences to the Downs family. We hope adding Dr. Downs to the Clayton State Athletics Hall of Fame last February was a great memory for the family. He was truly deserving of the honor!

Warmest wishes,

Tim Duncan  
Director of Athletics

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**Tim Duncan** - January 06, 2017 at 12:14 PM

JD

“ We have read with sadness of the passing of Dr. Downs. He was, and will always be, the 'Dr. Downs' who showed us by word and example the importance of doing whatever was possible to assist the students who passed through our classes. He was truly a model for us. The University System of Georgia is better because of his service in the various positions he held in it over the years. Our sincere condolences and prayers for his family.

James and Ann Kathleen Doig

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**James & Ann Kathleen Doig** - January 05, 2017 at 08:00 PM

NP

“ In January 2001, we moved across the street from Harry and Melba Downs, moving from Fieldstone where I played golf with Harry's brother, Al Downs. Harry and I became immediate friends and for the next sixteen years Harry and I were the best of friends. What do you say about an outstanding individual that would do anything for you without any hesitation, always thinking about the other guy. He always told me I was in charge of the neighborhood but I knew all along, He was *The Man in charge*.

*Harry was a true scholar and a true Southern Gentleman and I will miss my very good friend.*

*Neil Passmore*

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**Neil and Dianne Passmore** - January 05, 2017 at 04:57 PM

SD

“ As founding president of Clayton State, Dr. Harry Downs realized Emilie Spivey's dream to build Spivey Hall, which opened in 1991. Through his visionary leadership and unwavering support, including his faithful service as trustee and chairman of The Walter and Emilie Spivey Foundation, millions of people's lives have been enriched by the performances of distinguished musicians appearing at Spivey Hall, also heard regionally, nationally and internationally in radio broadcasts, and through tour concerts by the Spivey Hall Children's Choir.

*No one loved Spivey Hall and its magnificent pipe organ, or believed in their importance, more than Dr. Downs. We may all be lastingly grateful for his life, and the countless caring and supportive ways in which he improved the lives of others.*

*On behalf of the community of artists, audiences and staff who share his love for Spivey Hall, I offer our deepest sympathies to his extended family.*

*Sam Dixon  
Executive and Artistic Director  
Spivey Hall, Clayton State University*

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**Sam Dixon** - January 05, 2017 at 03:29 PM

CS

“ *Charlene Peters and Mike Stevenson purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Harry Sims Downs.*



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**Charlene Peters and Mike Stevenson** - January 05, 2017 at 03:23 PM

GB

“ Dr. Downs was President of Clayton Junior College when I attended during 1971-1973. During my tenure at CJC, Dr. Downs became one of mentors. I could always count on Dr. Downs to provide me with great advice. In 1979, I became an employee of Clayton Junior. Dr. Downs welcomed me back to campus. I always valued his opinion and he contacted me on several occasions to ask me of my opinions on different topics. I am a better person for having had Harry Downs in my life.

*Dr. Gordon N. Baker  
Dean of Libraries  
Clayton State University*

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**Gordon Baker** - January 05, 2017 at 02:03 PM

KP

“ Becky I am truly sorry to hear of the passing of Harry. I extend my sincere sympathy to all of you at what I know is a very sad and mournful time. - Your dad lived a long and rewarding life and accomplished so much in his lifetime. He will long be remembered as the hardworking, intelligent and loving man that he was. - My thoughts and prayers will be with all of you.

*Aunt Kathy*

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**Kathy Peeler** - January 05, 2017 at 12:28 PM



“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Harry Sims Downs.



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January 05, 2017 at 10:07 AM

KI

“ Many many individuals have Dr. Harry Downs to thank for his vision, courage and passion for academic excellence. Both individuals and the community have benefited by the creation of what is now known as Clayton State College. I will not forget my college years there and the friendships that were made. There were many. May peace be with the family and May God continue to bless us all. Kim D. Ponder, 1989 graduate of CSC.



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**kim** - January 04, 2017 at 07:41 PM

JL

“ Harry was my second cousin, as far as I can figure it. His Grandmother, Lizzie Sims, was my Great Aunt. I have known Harry and his siblings all of my life, but have not lived close or communicated much. His brother, Al, was in my high school class. The last time I saw Harry was at a gathering of the Lunch Bunch. We send our love and sympathy to Melba and the family. He was a great guy and will be missed greatly. Jeanette Johnson Lackey and Bob Lackey

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**Jeanette J. Lackey** - January 04, 2017 at 01:48 PM

CW

Being now 82 years of age, and having known Harry since I was about 4 years of age, I reckon knowing him for 78 years is about 78 years of thinking Harry was at least 10 feet tall. He was always one of my heroes from high school basketball player, to his winning the local Soap Box Derby, his military service, his academic achievements and his personal friendship, and being one of the brightest stars of our community. I am so glad to have known him closely, and to claim his friendship. God rest you, Harry

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**Charles Walker** - January 08, 2017 at 01:29 PM