

# North Shore Summer Project

## Activists: Past and Present



**Linda Davis**

After graduating from New Trier, Linda went off to Oberlin College where, in the summer of '64, she went south with a group of recruits to participate in Freedom Summer. In addition to helping black residents register to vote, she taught at a Freedom School in Sunflower County. Part of the second strand of civil rights activists, she was sent to Oxford Ohio, arriving the same day that three civil rights workers had been kidnapped and, as later discovered, murdered. Rather than turning back, she promised to send her parents a postcard every day, noting that she inherited her courage from black activists like Fannie Lou Hamer.

Linda continued to live as a civil rights worker in Mississippi until the end of the summer of '65 but remembers her family's excitement about Dr. King's Winnetka speech. Her parents, Jean and Charles Davis, helped obtain the permit to use the Village Green – a process that included a very volatile meeting at the Village Hall where her father, one of the most pacifist of men, almost got in a fist fight with an irate opponent.

She also recalls the alarm of the Rumsfeld family (who owned and rented out the house next door to her family's Winnetka home) when they saw a moving truck in front of the Davis home. Turns out it was just Linda's uncle, dropping off some furniture, but given the Davis family's activism, the Rumsfelds were on guard.

Linda's career has embodied the Davis family's social justice principles. After serving as a trial attorney in the Criminal Section of the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice from 1976 through 1979, she became a Deputy Chief of that section. In these positions, she prosecuted cases of police misconduct and of racial and religious violence throughout the nation. In June 1984, she became Chief of the Criminal Section, remaining in that position until 1995 when she was appointed to the Superior Court of the District of Columbia in 1995 by President Clinton, a position from which she recently retired. As Chief of the Criminal Section, Judge Davis assumed responsibility for managing the nationwide enforcement of the federal criminal civil rights laws, including prosecution of militant members of the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups and prosecution of the Los Angeles Police Department officers for beating Rodney King.

[July 2015, by Sherry Medwin]