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James Melvin Neal of Kershaw honored with highway memorial

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Jimmy Neal



The late Rep. Jimmy Neal's name has been memorialized on highway signs in his native Kershaw.

The portion of U.S. 521 from Andrew Jackson High School in Lancaster County to the intersection of U.S. 601 was renamed the "Representative Jimmy Neal Memorial Highway," in honor of the late James Melvin "Jimmy" Neal.

He represented Lancaster County for 14 years as a member of the S.C. House of Representatives.

Neal was born April 30, 1943, and died Aug. 26, 2020. He was the son of the late James Melvin Neal and Annie Mae Horton Neal Smith and the stepson of the late William Bryant Smith. In 1968, he married Harriet Hawkins, who died before him.

Neal earned his undergraduate degree from Clemson University in 1965, and then earned a master's degree in education from Winthrop University in 1978. He was a teacher, coach and principal in Lancaster County School District for more than 30 years. He was the first head football coach at Andrew Jackson School. Neal was inducted into the Lancaster County Education Hall of Fame in 2006.

He was also a board member of the Catawba Regional Council of Governments and the Lancaster County Water and Sewer District.

Neal's son, Bryant Neal, who owns 521 Filling Station in Kershaw, said it was a complete surprise to the family, but well-deserved as his father, Jimmy, devoted his entire life to the community and church.

“It's just an honor,” he said. “Just very, very proud. Because my dad was a humble guy, he probably wouldn't like this too much.”

The proposal to name the highway was first introduced to the S.C. House in January 2022 by Reps. Sandy McGarry, Brandon Newton, Richie Yow and Jay Lucas. It went to the S.C. Senate in April 2022. It was last amended in May 2022 and adopted by the S.C. General Assembly on May 12, 2022.

Neal had two sons, Bryant and Scott, as well as five grandchildren and one great-granddaughter, who will be able to see their grandfather's legacy continue in the community.

“I was just so happy for where they put it and he put it right on Highway 521,” Bryant Neal said. “Right up real close to our house and real close to the school and his church — all that throughout there together. And that's where he devoted most of his life, in the church and in the school.”