

## Dinwiddie County

### 2025 Hometown Hero: Dr. Willene A. Johnson



Willene A. Johnson is an economist who advises and instructs on issues related to finance and development. Her current assignments focus on strengthening governance capacity in the security sectors of African countries. To that end, she facilitates workshops in strategic planning and budgeting, as well as in peacekeeping and economic reconstruction.

Dr. Johnson was appointed by President Bill Clinton in 1999 to serve as the U.S. Executive Director of the African Development Bank. She was a member of the United Nations' Committee for Development Policy, and chair of the sub-Saharan Africa Advisory Committee of the U.S. Export-Import Bank (EXIM) where she worked to improve the access of American small businesses to EXIM services and financing. Dr. Johnson's global experience with economics and finance began with twenty years in the Federal Reserve System, where her assignments included research and operational responsibilities in international financial markets.

An advocate for quality education, Dr. Johnson taught elementary school, served as adjunct faculty at several universities, and recently served as a member of the Board of Trustees of Tuskegee University.

Dr. Johnson was born January 10, 1947 New York City. She was raised by her mother, Jeanne E. Robinson along with two sisters, Marilyn Bristow and Francesca Randolph. Although she was born and raised in the city, Dr. Johnson has lived in rural areas on three continents and cherishes the deep social networks and stunning beauty of our farms and woodlands; which she discovered at a young age as a Girl Scout on camping adventures.

She currently resides in Dinwiddie County on property that has been in her husband's family for more than 150 years. The property benefits from a working forest conservation easement with the Virginia Department of Forestry and has been recognized as a Virginia Century Forest.

From August 2021 – June 2023, Dr. Johnson served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Center for Rural Virginia. She supported the work of the Center to advance economic development, analyzing and encouraging initiatives aimed at assuring prosperity for rural Virginia. She contributed to the success of the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute, identifying potential participants – particularly those from Dinwiddie County.

Dr. Johnson has been a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration since November 2021. As an active member of the NAPA International Standing Panel, she works with other Fellows, scholars, and practitioners to compare how governments in different countries are adapting to climate change.

She is a member of St. James Episcopal Church and is active with the Episcopal Church Women and the Congo Network. She has joined others in the Diocese in the Matoaka Covenant aimed at building relationships of mutual respect with the indigenous tribes of Virginia.

Dr. Johnson has been married to her husband, W. Phillip Johnson, for 55 years (this year). They are blessed with three sons and five grandchildren.

She speaks several languages including Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Swahili.

Relaxing is not in her nature, as there is still so much to learn! In her free time, Dr. Johnson enjoys learning about plants and trees. She enjoys visiting the McKenney Farmers' Market and loves Richland's Creamery!