

Henrietta Lacks



LEGACY / WEEK

CELEBRATE

THE LEGACY OF AN
IMMORTAL WOMAN

SEPT
23-29,

2018

Throughout Virginia
Richmond and Halifax County, VA



Henrietta Lacks

A hero whose legacy continues to live on in medicine, public health, and biomedical research.

Henrietta Lacks is a native Virginian who received medical treatment at Johns Hopkins Hospital for cervical cancer. As an African-American woman in the pre-civil rights era, cancer treatment and medical research were not done like they are today. Without her or her family's consent or knowledge, scientists took tissue samples from Henrietta's body. They soon discovered that Lacks' cells continued to multiply. In fact, they are still alive today! As the source of these immortal cells, her cells became known as "HeLa" cells (taking the first two letters of her first and last names).

Before HeLa cells, scientists spent more time trying to keep cells alive, than actually conducting cellular research. But, the endless supply of Henrietta's rapidly replicating HeLa cells made more time for scientific discovery. That's why HeLa cells are a staple in biomedical research labs, even today. We have Henrietta Lacks and her immortal cells to thank for many medical breakthroughs including the polio vaccine, aids and cancer treatments, and genome sequencing.

On July 1, 2018, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam signed into law the creation of the Henrietta Lacks Commission. Governor Northam has proclaimed September 23-29, 2018 as Henrietta Lacks Legacy Week—to coincide with the inaugural meeting of the Henrietta Lacks Commission. The commission plans to create a biomedical cancer research center in Halifax, Virginia to honor Henrietta's life and legacy.

Virginia is proud to honor Henrietta Lacks in this historic way!

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