

— Who Was Richard C. Sullivan? —

Our library is officially the “*Richard C. Sullivan Public Library of Wilton Manors*”. So, who was Mr. Sullivan and why is the library named after him? It turns out the answer is not widely known. But thanks to research by the City Clerk’s Office, a 2005 Sun-Sentinel article and interviews with legacy Library staff and Friends, here’s what we know about this enigmatic gentleman:

Sullivan was born around **1921** and grew up in the Midwest. He graduated as valedictorian of his high school class, was awarded a scholarship to the University of Wisconsin and there received his BBA degree; then went on to American University in Washington D.C. for an MBA. In later years he often noted that his early academic successes were due to the love for learning he developed using the “Carnegie Library” in his town. (Steel magnate Andrew Carnegie funded/built some 1,800 public libraries in the U.S. between 1883 and 1929.)

After graduate school he began a career as a civil servant at the Federal level—serving in the Navy Department, Military Sea Transportation Agency and the Postmaster General Division. According to one source his work was related to mapping/cartography.

After retirement, he moved to Wilton Manors around **1972**. There’s no record of why he selected the city as his retirement home. (His attorney did later note that he was “estranged from his family”). His home was in the Coral Point subdivision and said to be “antique and art-filled”. Sources variously describe Sullivan as “reserved”, “...a very private person”, “...not someone that was easy to get to know”. His live-in caregiver for the last five years of his life noted "He was a humble man. He just liked education ... he really liked people to learn."

Recalling the impact the “Carnegie Library” had on his childhood, Sullivan’s first opportunity to also be a library benefactor came in **2003**. Our library had been recently expanded, but there was no budget to open or furnish the new Children’s Wing. Sullivan heard about a Friends of the Library fundraiser and offered a \$40,000 check (\$71,000 today), if the Children’s Wing could be dedicated to his deceased long-time companion Robert Dittrich. It was gratefully accepted.

While Mr. Sullivan couldn’t emulate Carnegie by building a library, he came close. The library expansion was funded by a \$350,000 bond issue. With his death in **2005**, at the age of 84, came a surprise endowment in his will. His estate would pay off the remaining library bond debt of \$280,000 (\$450,000 today) if the City would rename the facility after him.

And thus, we recognize the philanthropic legacy of Richard C. Sullivan’s support and love of libraries and learning.

