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The Southside Chronicle



President's Message

by Dr. John H. Rivers

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It's that time again my friends. **Our 7th Annual Legacy Dinner** will be held on November 7, 2015, at the Feather Falls Casino in Oroville. We will be honoring three pioneering families who help create and sustain the Southside Black Community. Members from these families contributed to the important work of modeling and mentoring children, as well as, building Black Churches. These families contributed to the cultural and economic development of Oroville. The historical record of Oroville is not complete unless their story is a part of the record.

They worked in the agricultural fields, sawmills, construction sites, hospitals, and fruit cannery. Their contributions to the growth in the local economy and cultural social history are similar to events in other locations in the nation. Local religious and educational institutions were infused with rich hopeful heritage from southern roots. These Americans citizens sought to experience a life of opportunity and fair treatment. **The honorees this year are Odell and Maggie Myles Jr., Samuel and Lonia Lacey, and Rosalie and Walter Bell.**

We hope that you will join us in this one affirming pursuit of that better life. Tickets are \$45 and can be obtained by sending payment to SOAAHS, 936 18TH St. Oroville Ca, 95965. Call our office(530-533-7388), if you need more information. We have arranged for discounted rooms at Holiday Inn Express (530-538-4560). Ask them for rooms for our organization. You can also get very clean rooms at our local Super 8 Motel as low as \$60 per night. You must go on line to arrange for this discount. The rooms are limited, so make your reservation ASAP. We are expecting a large attendance at the Dinner and it would be wise to get your tickets as soon as possible.

We have written about some the outstanding contributions and accomplishments made by individuals who benefited from guidance from Southside Elders. This newsletter features another individual who helped her classmates and friends. She married another high achiever and went on the help thousands of other Black and low-income people acquire their first homes.

The developmental experiences of her generation in Southside were varied and balanced with social, athletic, religious, and academic resources. Perhaps one additional experience that **Mary Lee Widener** had in Southside was a unique emphasis on leadership development.

See you in November.

John

<u>Upcoming Events</u>
<u>October 10, 2015 11am</u> Board of Directors meeting New Home Missionary BC, 4380 Lower Wyandotte Rd Oroville, CA 95966. Society members and the public are invited to attend.
<u>November 7, 2015 4:30pm to 8:30pm</u> 7th Annual Legacy Dinner.

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

by Van Bilbo

We have successfully transitioned over to having all members pay their dues on March 1 of each year. I would like, to thank those members who have renewed and remind the members who haven't yet renewed to do so at their earliest convenience. The new due date, for membership dues gives the board of directors more latitude in planning activities for the year.

Membership dues are vital to SOAAHS. Despite the fact that we will have 2 fundraises for the year(a BBQ and a Garage Sale) membership dues are still our major source of funding. Dues help fund activities throughout the year. Some of the activities for the year include:

- Producing and distributing the Southside Chronicle Newsletter
- Creating oral history videos
- Researching Butte County Official Records and old local newspaper articles
- Planning of The 2015 Legacy Awards Ceremony

Our goal this year is to increase the number of members that we have. By increasing membership we will be able to continue on our quest to Research, Preserve and Present the history of African American People in South Oroville and the surrounding areas. If you are a member please spread the word about SOAAHS to friends and family. If you are not a member please consider joining. Applications are available on our website at SOAAHS.org or by call calling 530 533-7388 and requesting an application.

Building Fund Update

by Dr. John H. Rivers

Our plan to obtain funding from the State Park Department was not successful, which required that we come up with a new method and plan to build the new center and park. The Board decided to finish the work began by Elders in 1967. This time we promise to not get derailed by false promises made by others, but we will take responsibility to raise the funds ourselves alone with the generous help from our members and friends. We started a building funding which is managed by the North Valley Community Foundation in Chico Ca. (530-891-1150).

As descendants of slaves whose virtues, loyalty, and determination is well documented, we understand the value of constructing living symbols and reminders of our common walk toward shared and unchallenged freedom. The proposed Historic Center and Park are markers that help others understand the nature of this walk, and remind the public of the common bonds that link a diverse people into a nation of promises and deeds unfinished.

We ask for your financial donations to help us do our part in finishing the walk and completing the deeds that would make us all measurably equal in treatment and opportunity (education, employment, health/medical care, and legal/social justice).

Board members have pelage to make monthly donation to the building fund. Please join with us in this important effort. Board members will give what they can each month and we ask you to join with us to grow the building fund. The small amounts will add up quickly if the number of donations increases over the days, weeks, and months to come. Send your donations to SOAAHS Building fund, at 936 18th St. Oroville, Ca. 95965. We will send you a donation receipt that can be used for tax donations to educational charities. You will receive this receipt for each donation. Please join us in this important effort.

“No one achieves any great thing, without the help of others”

By Dr. John H. Rivers

Mary Lee Widener grew up in Southside in the early 1950's. She is one of two daughters of Mert Sr. and Johnnie Thomas. Her brother Rev. Mert Thomas Jr. was an active leader in Southside and Oroville proper. Mary married Warren Widener who was the first Black Mayor of Berkley Ca. They were high school sweet hearts. Warren and Mary have three sons.

Mary and Warren were in the top academic students group at Oroville Union High School.

Warren went into the Air Force and later entered politics, while Mary focused on housing needs of low-income and racial minorities. She and Warren organized and lead tutorial help for their fellow students. Alone with others, they organized youth parties and social activities for Southside residents. During these times social integration between the races in Oroville was non-existent. Southside youths enjoyed a full range of social activities, which was supported by parents and Elders.

Home ownership is the primary goal of families in America. It is the pathway to achieving middle class status. Most low-income people find it difficult if not impossible to own a home. Mary's labor and commitment to help solve this problem has no equal. She leads a national effort to help families obtain home ownership.



Mary Lee Widener

Mary founded and currently serves as President and Chief Executive Officer for Neighborhood Housing Services of America (NHSA)

She led the growth of the organization from a \$250,000 pilot in 1974 to a social investment conduit of 1.8 billion in 2010. Her national organization provide neighborhood revitalization and homeownership opportunities to hundreds of communities around the country. NHSA purchase nonstandard loans from affiliated community development organizations and their lending partners, and then sell notes backed by the loans and credit enhancements to socially responsive institutional investors.

Mary currently serves on the board of directors of Core Logic, Operation Hope, Inc., and the National Housing Conference. She is also is a Trustee Emeritus of both the San Francisco Foundation and Partners for Livable Communities.

Some of her past professional activities includes serving as chairman and director of the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco and chairman of the Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco's affordable housing advisory council. She also participated on the U.S. Senate's National Housing Task Force and in the International Exchange of Housing Professionals sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

Her honors include the 2008 Community Investment Award of the National Interagency Community Reinvestment Conference sponsored by the community investment officers of the financial regulatory agencies. Mary was the featured speaker at the 2007 Fifth Biennial Academic Research Conference of the Federal Reserve System on Financing Community Development. Her topic was entitled "learning from the past, looking to the future". Mary is the recipient of the National Conference 2000 Housing Person of the year Award.

Yes, yes, yes, there is something about these people.

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