



Roanoke Branch NAACP 11th Annual Citizen of the Year Awards Program

**"NAACP We Are 100
Bold Dreams - Big Victories"**

September 25, 2009

Reception 7:00 P.M.

Dinner/Awards Program 8:00 P.M.

Hotel Roanoke and Conference Center

110 Shenandoah Avenue

Roanoke, VA 24013



Biography of Carla M. Lewis

Work History of Gainsboro Library



Carla M. Lewis, Branch Manager:

I visited Roanoke on advice from Verdelle Bradley, former librarian of Virginia Union University, to interview for a position at the Gainsboro Branch Library in 1973. I was told right away that I had the position. Ms. Emily Keyser drove me to meet with Mrs. Louise Bowling, the only staff member at the branch at that time, and to find out the availability of housing in the area. Mrs. Bowling said, "We have a large house and you can come live with us." Well that was one of the best decisions of my life because was nurtured and loved just like a family member and ate scrumptious meal everyday. Mr. Bowling prepared most of the meals during the week and Mrs. Bowling would prepare the Sunday family feast. I lived with the Bowling's for 6 months "10 pounds heavier" before moving to an apartment in the Claytor's old home place.

During her 36½ years of working for the Roanoke Public Library System, Carla worked with the following directors: Ms. Himes, Ms. Keyser, Mr. Whitelock, Ms. James, Mr. Zarasky and Mrs. Umberger and her community.

Carla M. Lewis was instrumental in getting the following accomplishments organized and completed during her 36½ years of service. In 1973 she started story hours for preschool aged children, including First Baptist Church, Rugby, Lincoln Terrace and the primary students at Roanoke Catholic Elementary. Planned and implemented programs for after school youth, especially during the holidays, when schools were closed for several days.

Had a fascination for puppetry and parlayed that interested into getting more children ready for a lifelong interest in reading. The puppets were made and purchased most by Carla. Puppet shows for all aged children were preformed, including a version "of the Three Little Pigs," for Virginia's 1st Lady, Linda Robb on one of her visits to Roanoke.

Honored Mrs. Virginia Y. Lee, who was so instrumental in the construction and success of the library, by naming the collection the "Virginia Y. Lee African American History Collection" in 1982. this collection consists of autographed pictures, rare and first edition books and a taped interview of Mrs. Lee. Many volumes have been added to keep this collection updated for schools, casual readers and those who will continue to do research.

Worked closely with a Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent to assist new mothers with fast and easy ways to prepare nutritious and healthy snacks for their family. We also had programs to inform patrons of nutritious facts and how to read labels.

Worked on a Bill and Melinda Gates grant to get new computers donated to the library where the economic status of the homes were in the mid to low income bracket.

In 2006, initiated the Roanoke Public Library's Oral History Project that collects and preserves stories of long-ago by interviewing neighborhood patrons. They shared these stories with us, making it possible for children, researchers and family members (as far back as the 1920s and 1930s) to listen and compile data for the future generations. This project is used by most of the libraries in the City of Roanoke today and Virginia Tech School of Public and International Affairs in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies.

Proud to work with community leaders who were instrumental in getting this library listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

Attended a Virginia Library Association (VLA) Conference in Hot Springs, Virginia in 2007 to share my inspiration behind the Oral History project and the logistics of how to make it happen.

The Thursday Night Gathering to discuss current events, music, child care, nutritious snacks, girl talk, guy talk, marriages, buying a house, reading to children, best books, job openings, buying a car and many other topics became our famous "Cafe' Night". We expanded on this by adding light jazz, poetry slams, story telling, name that tune and yes refreshments.

Was nominated by Beta Chi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. to receive the Unsung Hero Award for outstanding service to the community.

A puppet show was preformed at the 2007 opening of the Library Kiosk at Valley View Mall.

Initiated and compiled local and national African American questions. These questions were used throughout the library system and shared with local colleges and universities for our African American History Month Contest.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) awarded the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. service award to the Gainsboro Branch Library for promoting the dream of Peace, Unity and Justice.

In 2008 oversaw a major renovation to this library which was built in 1942. the size of the building has almost doubled, adding a spacious meeting room, (capacity of 125) teen center, study room and lots of improvements.

Nominated to participate in "Women of a New Tribe", a photographic exhibit at the Harrison Museum of African American Culture. This program named 29 African American women who have made significant community contributions in the greater Roanoke community.

A tribute honoring Clara Lewis for outstanding service at the Gainsboro Library and unveiling her portrait was held on March 12, 2009. the friends of the Library and the Library Foundation sponsored this program.

Four things I am most proud of and stand out in my memory are community service outreach, including the historic designation of the library, story hours/puppet shows, dedication of the Virginia Y. Lee Collection and the oral history initiative.

Oddball Outreach:

Gainsboro Library staff volunteered to participate in a Christmas parade, borrowing a tractor trailer from a local business, W. S. Connelly & Son on Madison Avenue. Our mascot was a tiger made by using a saw horse as the base. The float was made by neighborhood children and faithful parents. The children was so excited that they wanted to have a contest to name the tiger. After many days of voting, the name was selected, Tempermoneous K. Purcat. Our children were proud of one of the loveliest floats in the parade.

Past and present member of the following organizations:

Sweet Union Baptist Church – (Teaches Sunday School and assists with holiday dramas).

Big Brothers/Big Sisters – (As a Board Member she matched big brothers and big sisters with little brothers and little sisters, participated in outings and fundraising).

Jefferson Cup – (This committee honors a distinguished biography, historical fiction or American history book for young people. Their goal is to promote reading about America's past: to encourage the quality writing of United States history, biography and historical fiction for young people and to recognize authors in these disciplines).

Apple Ridge Farm Board – (This organization provides academic and outdoor activities for low-income children from inner city Roanoke).

Blue Ridge Public Television Community Advisory Board – (This board discusses the upcoming programs for the season and publicity measures).

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority – (This sorority is the oldest with a mission to be "service to all mankind").

Harrison Museum of African American Culture Steering Committee -- (Volunteers to work each year with their fundraiser, Henry Street Festival).

Carla's Heroes:

My family, especially my mom is my hero. She was a local missionary who went from church to church speaking God's goodness and love. People would travel from miles away to hear her message. Her favorite saying was "If I can help someone along the way, then my living would not be in vain". My father worked as farmer to support his family of eight children. It was instilled in us to give back to our community and get together as a family as often as possible to share stories and enjoy each other.

Personal:

Married to Peter A. Lewis and between them they have three sons, Cedric Pullen, Peter S. and John R. Lewis, six grandchildren, Derric, Andre', Markus, Miles, Langston and Leah.

I would like to express THANKS to my family and my community because without them, I could not have completed the number of projects that we shared.