

Olive James Burroughs (1950-2003)

By Jerry Long
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Olive James Burroughs



NOTABLE KENTUCKY
AFRICAN AMERICANS
DATABASE



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Burroughs, Olive Marie James

(born: September 24, 1950 - died: June 6, 2003)

Olive M. Burroughs was born in Owensboro, KY, the daughter of Leroy Sr. and Minnie L. James. Olive Burroughs was the first African American woman elected to the Owensboro, KY City Commission, first in 1995 and continuously until 2002. She was instrumental in developing the Neighborhood Alliance and the Owensboro Youth Council. Burroughs also served on the Kentucky Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, the National League of Cities Human Development Committee, and the Coalition Drug Task Force of U. S. Representative Lewis Heartland.

The Heritage Award was presented to Burroughs posthumously by the Owensboro Board of Realtors in 2004; it is the highest community honor. Burroughs received many additional awards, including the NAACP Herman E. Floyd Award. She retired from BellSouth and was a licensed realtor.

For more see "Burroughs wins Heritage Award posthumously," Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer, 5/12/2004; Josh Kelly, "'We've made an accomplishment here.' Olive Burroughs and the origin of the Neighborhood Alliance," 2/18/2022, online at Owensboro Times; and James Maysie, "Voice for the People: Burroughs, first Black woman on city commission, left lasting mark," 2/14/2022, Messenger-Inquirer (Owensboro); "Obituaries: Olive James Burroughs," Messenger-Inquirer, 06/08/2003, p.14.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 20 January 1987, p.1C:



Sub-freezing temperatures didn't stop 6-year-old Keturah Leachman, fourth from right, from enjoying a downtown parade celebrating the Rev. Martin Luther King's birthday. Joined with her from right are her father and mother, Charles and Bonnie Leachman, 187 Martin Way, friend, Olive Burroughs of Owensboro. The parade traveled from City Hall to the Daviess County Courthouse. [Olive Burroughs was one of the organizers of the march.]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 15 March 1988, p.3E:

Commentary

Merger issue spurs women to stand up, be counted

Thunder didn't roll and lightning flash. But something of a momentous occasion occurred Tuesday night.

Mark it on your calendar and put it in the dates-to-remember category.

May 10, 1988: A day when women stood up to be counted in the Daviess County political arena.

Olive Burroughs started it. She simply asked the Urban County Charter Commission to include minority members on a committee that will determine if a merged government would elect its leaders from political parties or independent candidates.

It sounds like a simple enough matter. But the only black candidate ever elected to a paid government position in Daviess County is City Commissioner R.L. McFarland. And city commissioners are elected independently.

Aloma Dew continued the move by insisting that women are also minorities. Two women have been elected to the City Commission as independents, but it's been 20 years since a woman won office in Daviess County as a candidate for a political party.

"Women haven't had much to say about government around here," Ms. Dew said.

It was interesting that when Ms. Burroughs made her request, the objection was not that she is black or that she is a woman.

A county appointee to the commission objected that both black members of the commission are city appointees. And he didn't want to upset the delicate committee balance between urban and rural members.

That's a major step forward when skin color and sex are not important. The next step is to realize that we all live in Daviess County.

And Marksberry was willing to compromise. He moved to appoint Ms. Burroughs to the committee. Just add a county person to offset the new city person on the committee, he said.

Of course that that person turned out to be a man – giving the committee seven men and one woman. But a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, as the fortune cookies say.

Women finally spoke up in the political arena. And they were heard.

Maybe the day will eventually come when half or more of the members of the important boards in the community – and the paid political offices – are held by women.

Radical thought, but it's possible. And maybe blacks also will be moving more into positions of power in Daviess County.

The key is getting involved. If you're interested in serving on a city or county board, call or write Daviess Judge-Executive Bill Froehlich and Mayor David Adkisson.

Tell them your interests and your qualifications. Start speaking out and making yourself heard. It's sort of a Southern tradition to wait to be asked. That's one tradition we can do without.

A cross section of the community is needed to make sure government – whatever type we end up with – really represents all the people of Daviess County.

The merger commission is moving its meetings to Daviess County High School at 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Television is into reruns. This is more exciting.

If you're interested, there are 800 or more free seats in the DCHS auditorium. One of them is ready for you. It's a start.

Whether Owensboro, Whitesville and Daviess County ever merge their governments, the Urban County Charter Commission has accomplished something. It's getting a lot of people involved in the political arena.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 22 February 1989, pp.1C & 4C:

Researcher pieces together black history

By Steve Thomas, Messenger-Inquirer

Owensboro's black history begins in 1800, but trying to recall that storied past is difficult, according to Olive Burroughs, who has been researching the topic.

"Black history was not recorded," she said during a speech Tuesday night before the Daviess County Historical Society.

No books exist on the subject, no photos of early blacks exist and few references to early blacks in Daviess County are written anywhere, she said.

But through newspaper obituaries and interviews with elderly blacks in the area, Mrs. Burroughs said she has been able to begin putting the pieces together to form an outline of what happened.

The first piece in the picture begins in 1800, when Bill Smothers of Owensboro brought the first black man to the city. It was part of a joke he was playing on a friend in Ohio County by bringing him a slave, said Mrs. Burroughs, an operator at South Central Bell Telephone Co.

Other pieces in black history include the arrival of Josiah Henson, the original Uncle Tom, and a group of slaves in 1827 after being sent here to work on a plantation by their master.

The next recorded history of blacks comes in 1861 at beginning of the Civil War, with the population data showing 11,958 whites in the county, 3,515 slaves and about 75 free blacks.

Mrs. Burroughs said the Emancipation Proclamation freed Southern blacks in 1863, but for a reason she hasn't been able to determine, Daviess County blacks weren't freed until 1865.

On April 6, 1867, blacks in Daviess County were first allowed to vote. Then in March 1875, civil rights protests officially began in Owensboro as a black woman attempted to get a room at the Planters House, a hotel at the intersection of Third and Frederica streets. "She was refused," Mrs. Burroughs said.

In that same month, H. Clay Helm became the first black man to seek public office in Owensboro. He received 96 votes for city council.

Also in 1875, black labor formed its first union and began a strike. Mrs. Burroughs said she hasn't been able to get any other details about this.

In 1884, federal courts ordered separate but equal schools for black and white children. In Owensboro that same year, the black school was burned along with its equipment before it could be opened.

White teachers were hired to teach the black children, but after objections by the black community, the first black teacher was hired in 1896.

In 1898, Dr. J.M. Peters, a local black politician, ran for city councilman on the Republican ticket but was persuaded to back out. As a reward, he was appointed jail physician for federal prisoners in Daviess County in 1899.

The second century of Owensboro's black community begin in March 1900 with the first black man to be named to a city position. Albert Young was named as keeper of the pest house, a place for housing people stricken with contagious diseases, such as smallpox.

Around the turn of the century, Owensboro had a strong and vibrant black community with black doctors, black lawyers and many other professionals. Several black-owned businesses also existed.

Today, there are no black lawyers or doctors in Owensboro and few black-owned businesses, Mrs. Burroughs said.

"Anything that was needed could be found in the black community," she said. "The thing I wonder is why so much then and not so much now."

Several blacks in Owensboro during the 20th century have helped shape the city's future and have parks or buildings named after them.

Among them are Mary Harding of the Mary Harding Home, Dr. P.G. Walker of the P.G. Walker Apartments, Dr. Reginald and Hattie Neblett of the Neblett Center, and Joe Kendall and Joseph Perkins of Kendall-Perkins Park.

Mrs. Burroughs said she plans to continue her research and hopes to put it in written form. "I know there's so much there, and if it's not recorded it will be lost," she said.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 31 May 1995, pp.1A & 2A:

Burroughs joins commission

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer

Olive Burroughs, the newest Owensboro city commissioner, also is the first black woman to sit on the commission.

In a special meeting Tuesday night, the city commission chose Burroughs as an interim city commissioner to serve through the Nov. 7 general election. She fills the seat vacated by Commissioner Waymond Morris, who became mayor on May 2.

The vote was 3-0. Morris and City Commissioners Howard Whitehouse and R.L. McFarland voted for Burroughs. Commissioner Alan Braden abstained.

Moments after taking the oath of office, Burroughs took her seat at the commission table and performed her first official act: She moved to adjourn.

Afterward, Burroughs said she can be a bridge between blacks and whites and between blue-collar and white-collar workers.

"I feel I can offer a different perspective, one that is needed on the commission. I think diversity is good, and I feel I can bring that to the commission and make it good," Burroughs said.

Burroughs, 44, placed fifth behind the four incumbents in the 1993 city commissioner race. Her supporters argued that she deserved to be named city commissioner on that basis alone.

Braden said he appreciated the positive, upbeat campaign Burroughs ran. But he abstained in part because "I don't think necessarily finishing fifth in that campaign . . . automatically assumes" that a person should be on the commission.

Whitehouse, however, cited Burroughs' positive 1993 race as one reason why he voted for her.

"The ultimate test in a democracy is who has run and what have the people said. . . . Therefore, I don't think there is any test that can measure up to the test under fire of an election," he said.

Morris, too, said one of the deciding factors was that "Olive had been in a race before, and I think the campaign she ran was very good." For her part, Burroughs said she didn't think her 1993 finish "automatically meant that I should have gotten the spot." But she felt she is a qualified candidate and "I think the commissioners should have looked at what the public said."

Burroughs becomes the second African American after McFarland to join the commission. The Rev. Herman Floyd, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, applauded her selection.

"I think that every once in a while the system does work, and I think it did this time," he said.

"I think that the mayor and commissioners made the best choice - made the ideal choice - due to the fact that they were supporting the voice of the people," Floyd said. "I knew it took a lot of courage for them to do it, but I certainly feel like they did the right thing."

The commission chose Burroughs over four other candidates: Moretta Bosley, Cheryl King, Dick Moore and Leslie H. Reynolds.

Tuesday's special meeting at City Hall opened with the commission hearing brief statements from each applicant. Then the commissioners went behind closed doors in the mayor's office for nearly an hour before returning to open session in the commission chambers.

Morris said the commissioners had narrowed the field down to three and "at one point we were split equally over two candidates." He would not identify the finalists.

Burroughs, 44, is an Owensboro native and an employee of South Central Telephone Co. She has served as president of Josiah Henson Drama Board and the H.L. Neblett Community Center Board; vice president of the Cliff Hagan Boys Club and the Owensboro Central Labor Council; and treasurer of the Owensboro Human Relations Commission and local chapter of the NAACP.

She was a 1989 graduate of Leadership Owensboro. And she was a member of the Urban County Charter Commission, the Daviess County School System Strategic Planning Committee, the Junior League of Owensboro, the RiverPark Center board of directors, Leadership Black Kentucky, the Kentucky African-American Heritage Commission, the NAACP, and the founding committee of Owensboro Black Expo.

Burroughs is the only the fourth woman to sit on the city commission, and the first to sit on the board in 14 years.

The first female city commissioner was Evelyn Waltrip Williams, who joined the board in 1969 to fill out the rest of the term of her husband, Doug Williams, who died in office.

Claudia Myles, who served from 1976 through 1979, was the first woman be elected to the commission. The last woman to sit on the city commission was Ann Kincheloe in 1980-81.

The commission had until June 2 to fill the vacancy created when Morris resigned as commissioner to become mayor. That happened after David Adkisson resigned as mayor to join the chamber of commerce and Industry Inc.

If the commission had not filled the vacancy by June 2, Gov. Brereton Jones would have appointed a new commissioner.

Burroughs will serve as interim commissioner until a new commissioner is elected in November. She could run for election, too, as could other candidates who want the job. The filing deadline is 4 p.m. Aug. 8, according to the Kentucky Secretary of State's office.

The commissioner elected in November will fill out the rest of the term through the end of 1996. Burroughs said she will probably file in August and run for election for the remainder of the term that runs through the end of 1996.

But if Burroughs wants re-election to another two-year term beyond that, she could potentially face a primary election in May 1996 as well as a general election in November 1996.

Asked if she felt daunted by the prospect of three elections within one year, Burroughs said: "I am not one that runs away from hard work. If that's what it takes to make Owensboro the best place to live, I'll run three elections if I have to."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 4 June 1995, pp.1A & 2A:

Making History

**First black woman
on city commission
confident she'll
make a difference**

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer

Olive Burroughs sat behind her desk in Owensboro's City Hall, ready to take on her duties as the newest city commissioner.

She'd just been briefed on the 1995-96 budget, which comes up for a vote at Tuesday night's commission meeting. Later, she would sit for a chat with Mayor Waymond Morris.

She wore a pastel green dress, gold earrings and confidence. Gone were the tentativeness and uncertainty that sometimes plagued her previous interviews.

"I've never known my limits," Burroughs said. "I've never felt I can't go there because I'm not supposed to. I feel like I'm deserving just like everybody else, so I don't restrict myself."

That sense of no boundaries helped put Burroughs into the commissioner's office, making her the first woman to sit on the city commission in 14 years and the first black woman to do so in the city government's 129-year history.



Olive Burroughs is the first black woman to serve as a city commissioner in Owensboro's history, and the first woman to serve on the board in 14 years. "I think we've made history by saying, "We're doing the right thing," said Burroughs, who was sworn in Tuesday by City Clerk, Carol Blake.

Burroughs fills the vacancy created when Morris resigned as commissioner May 2 to succeed David Adkisson as mayor.

The deciding factor for the city commission to select Burroughs as an interim board member last week was her 1993 race for commissioner. She lost that race by 941 votes, but was the fifth-highest voter-getter among eight candidates. The four who finished ahead of her were incumbent commissioners.

No one was more surprised by the commission's selection than Burroughs herself. She wanted the job, but privately wondered whether the commission would pick a black woman for the job - particularly when another African-American, the Rev. R.L. McFarland, has sat on the commission since 1986.

"I thought, well, maybe my race is a factor," Burroughs said. "With a 4 percent black population (in Daviess County), maybe it's just reality and maybe my race is a factor. I hated to think that it was, but it really, really stayed at the forefront in my mind."

Burroughs said she respects the commission for choosing her.

"I think it says something to our children and I think it says something to our community, that we can look at a person for what they have to offer and their qualifications, and not let race be a factor," she said. "I think not only have we made history as far as me being the first African-American woman, I think we've made history by saying, 'We're fair. We're doing the right thing.'"

Furthermore, she said: "I feel like I can do a good job because I have the desire, and I think that I'm capable. It has nothing to do with race and nothing to do with being female. It has everything to do with being someone that has the desire to serve this community and work hard to make it the best place it can be." Those who have worked with Burroughs on other community projects and boards say she'll be conscientious as a city commissioner.

"She's a true professional," said Joe Roth, executive director of the Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club, where Burroughs is now executive vice president and in line to become president next year. Burroughs is a team player who "adds a lot of input" to board discussions, Roth said.

Joanne Kendall, a former president of the local NAACP, said "the Olive Burroughs I know is a person who gets things done, and she likes to see things done. She's got a lot of new ideas, and she sticks with it to see the task completed."

Kendall said Burroughs was "instrumental" in a campaign four or five years ago to clean up and instill pride in the West Fifth Street neighborhood.

Wayne Ballard, president of the Owensboro Central Labor Council, a coalition of 23 labor unions in four counties, said Burroughs "obviously cares for other people because she is involved in so many different things. She's a good volunteer, and as you know, good volunteers are hard to find."

Burroughs, 44, was born Olive James in Owensboro. Her mother, Minnie James, is a school crossing guard. Her father, Leroy James, worked for Velvet Milk and in construction; he died in 1992.

"My mom has really been the true influence in my life because she was a Brownie leader for about 35 years," Burroughs said. "She was really active and involved in the church and community, and I just picked that up from my mom."

Burroughs was a member of the Owensboro High School track team that took the state championship in 1967. She graduated the following year.

After graduation, at the age of 18, she married Jimmy Burroughs. They have a daughter, Yager, 25; a son, Courtney, 20; and a foster son, Kris Crawford, 21. They also have two grandchildren.

Burroughs had worked in a campaign for U.S. Sen. Wendell Ford, but her first real baptism in local politics came in 1988, when Mayor David Adkisson appointed her to the Urban County Charter Commission, the committee that sought to write a charter for merging the governments of Owensboro, Daviess County and Whitesville.

"I went on that board and I had the opportunity to sit down with past mayors and some of the most intelligent and most prominent people in this community. And I was really scared," Burroughs said.

"But I thought it was an opportunity to learn and it was really a turning point in my life. Not only did I see people that I could learn from, I realized I had a lot of potential, too."

If Burroughs was skittish about serving on the controversial commission, it was not apparent to Aloma Dew, another commission member. Dew recalls that Burroughs "was not intimidated by the power structure of white males."

Dew said Burroughs is "a rather self-contained, outwardly quiet woman, but when the time comes, she says what she thinks."

The merger was eventually defeated in a referendum, and Burroughs - invigorated by a new-found confidence - felt she needed to further her education. Her pursuit of a business administration degree from Brescia College is on hold, but she hopes to resume it.

In the meantime, Burroughs threw herself into community involvement. She has served on the Daviess County School System Strategic Planning Committee, the Junior League of Owensboro, the RiverPark Center board of directors, Leadership Black Kentucky, the Kentucky African-American Heritage Commission and the founding committee of Owensboro Black Expo.

Those experiences prepared her for her 1993 race for city commissioner, which is still cited as an example of positive, constructive campaigning. Rather than put City Hall on the defensive,

Burroughs said she generally supported the aims of the Adkisson administration. Voters apparently appreciated the effort. When the final votes were tallied, fourth-place finisher Alan Braden had 4,908 votes to Burroughs' 3,967.

And now, 1 1/2 years after that election, Burroughs sits on the commission. She says she's not out to make waves, but wants to familiarize herself with the workings of city government.

"I bring to the table a different perspective," she said. "I feel I have worked with people from all walks of life and I'm a respecter of persons. I can pretty much relate to anybody, the rich, the poor; the black and white; the old and the young. I just feel I have a real broad background that allows me to interject in ways that the people on the commission now may not have the insight on.

"I really and truly feel I can be a voice for all. I just respect people for who they are, and I feel that everyone's important, and we have to be conscious of that. I bring an understanding of people who have no jobs. I'm not so far removed from the situation that I can't understand where they're coming from. It's always important to have another side of the story."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 2 November 1995, pp.1A & 2A:



By Tracy L. McQueen, Messenger-Inquirer

Although Olive Burroughs has been a city commissioner for only six months, she has served on more community boards than many experienced politicians.

She's president of the H.L. Neblett Center, vice president of the board for the Cliff Hagan Boys and Girls Club and a member of the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission, to name a few. Previously, she served on the Urban County Charter Commission and the RiverPark Center Board.

"She's always been involved in community things," said Jimmy Burroughs, her husband of 27 years. "I don't see how she has the energy to do everything she does."

Olive Burroughs, a 45-year-old telephone operator, said she decided to seek the city commissioner's position because she cares about her hometown.

"This is not a knee-jerk reaction for me," Burroughs said. "I just felt like I could make a difference."

Burroughs is the first black woman ever to serve on the city commission in Owensboro's 129-year history, and the first woman to serve on the city commission in 14 years. She said she gives the commission diversity, which she believes is vital in making City Hall more accessible to the community. She said too many residents feel alienated from city government.

"I feel like the African American community feels left out to an extent. I feel like women have been left out," Burroughs said. "City government is for all people."

Born Olive James, Burroughs has lived in Owensboro all of her life. She was a member of the Owensboro High School track team that took the state championship in 1967, and graduated the following year. At the age of 18, she married Jimmy Burroughs.

Jimmy Burroughs believes his wife is well-suited for public office because she can relate to people from all walks of life. He said she's easy to talk to because she cares about other people's ideas.

"Not only does she listen, she hears," he said. "She just has a quality about her. She can communicate with people."

Burroughs ran unsuccessfully for city commissioner two years ago. Of eight candidates, she finished fifth behind the four incumbents.

When a commissioner's position became available in May – after Waymond Morris was appointed by his commission colleagues to succeed David Adkisson as mayor – Burroughs applied for the job.

Others did too, and Burroughs said at the time she was concerned that commissioners might be reluctant to choose her because the commission already had one black member, the Rev. R.L. McFarland.

But she said she's not concerned about race being a factor in this fall's campaign, in which she's being challenged by Clyde Miller and Dick Moore in Tuesday's election.

"To me, it's just not important," Burroughs said. "I don't worry about my color. I'm me. I'm Olive Burroughs."

A fresh perspective

Linda Board, a close friend of Burroughs, said Burroughs is a caring person who's committed to her community.

"She has a special interest in youth," Board said.

Burroughs believes Owensboro must do more to retain its young people. Often, she said, young people here leave to go to college and never come back.

Attracting more good jobs to the community is vital to keeping young people here, Burroughs said.

Board, who has known Burroughs for about 30 years, said they have become close friends in recent years, working together to organize several community events, including the African American Cultural Festival.

"I truly enjoy working with Olive," she said. "She has so much knowledge about the community." Board said it's easy to approach Burroughs with a concern.

"She tries to see it from the other person's perspective, and it's easy for her to do that because of her diverse background," Board said. "She's always willing to listen."

That policy extends to her colleagues on the commission and even to City Hall critics like Moore, who has criticized Burroughs for being too reluctant to speak out.

Burroughs has been cordial to Moore through most of the campaign, but she didn't hesitate to stand up to him at a recent forum when he criticized her for not speaking out against the county's \$3 monthly landfill fee and a fuel adjustment increase by OMU.

She said city officials did oppose the landfill fee, but noted that the county imposed it despite that opposition. And, she pointed out, the city has taken steps to re-evaluate OMU's fuel adjustment fee.

Burroughs said she's enjoyed her time as a commissioner, and believes she brings a fresh perspective to the board. Although she seemed timid at first, she's seemingly become more vocal at each meeting. She appears well-versed on the issues and frequently asks questions.

That reflects Burroughs' style, Board said.

"Before she makes a decision, she studies," Board said. "She doesn't just go in and make a decision based on what someone else says."

That was illustrated shortly after her appointment to the commission, when Burroughs abstained from voting on the city's 1995-96 budget. She told her colleagues she hadn't had enough time to review the \$40 million document thoroughly.

And just a few weeks ago, she said in an interview that she opposes giving tax dollars to the RiverPark Center for operations – even though most city officials, including Mayor Waymond Morris, support that practice.

Board said Burroughs has no problem speaking her mind, and would not be afraid to stand against other elected officials if she disagrees with them.

"She will be the lone ranger," Board said. "She's willing to stand up for what she believes in."

Profile: Olive Burroughs

Name: Olive Burroughs

Address: 3206 Bobwhite Ave.

Date of birth: Sept. 24, 1950

Occupation: Telephone operator at BellSouth

Family: Husband, Jimmy; two children and a foster son

Education: 1968 graduate of Owensboro High School; attended Brescia College

Political offices held: City commissioner since May



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 8 November 1995, p.1A:



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 8 November 1995, p.1C & 6C:

Burroughs makes history

Victory first for African American woman in city

By Greg Kocher, Messenger-Inquirer

Olive Burroughs on Tuesday became the first African American woman elected to the Owensboro City Commission, routing two opponents as she made history.

Celebrating Tuesday night at her home with family, Burroughs said the election is "one thing that everyone in Owensboro should be proud of. I think that every African American woman can hold her head up high and say, 'We've made an accomplishment here' and every citizen can say the same thing.

"I will do everything I possibly can to be the best city commissioner there is," she said.

Burroughs took 49 percent of the vote in a three-way contest with Dick Moore and Clyde Miller, winning in 41 of 49 city precincts.

The final tally was: Burroughs, 6,457 votes; Moore, 4,286; and Miller, 2,404.

Burroughs has been a city commissioner since May 30, when the three other commissioners appointed her to the seat vacated by Waymond Morris, who succeeded former Mayor David Adkisson on May 2.

Burroughs' appointment extended through Tuesday's election, and her victory means she will serve the rest of Morris' unexpired term through the end of 1996.

"It's nice to be appointed, but it's really wonderful to be elected," Burroughs said before hugging a grandson.

Burroughs, a 45-year-old telephone operator, could face two more elections next year if she decides to seek re-election. All four city commission seats will be up for grabs.

If nine or more candidates file for those seats - the deadline is in January - Burroughs would run again in a May 1996 primary. The top eight vote-getters would move on from there to the November general election, with the four top vote-getters getting commission seats.

Running three races in 18 months could take a toll on any campaign war chest.

"In all honesty, it's a little bit harder for an African American female to generate money. I have to prove myself," said Burroughs, who reported raising \$2,700 through late October. "I just could not generate the money I needed to generate a campaign like I should have. But I did the best I could with what I had."

Moore, 50, an insurance agent, lost his fourth straight election. A 1986 bid for county commissioner, a 1993 race for city commissioner and a try in the 1995 mayoral primary all were unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, Moore said it is a "good possibility" that he will run for elected office again, possibly for city commissioner next year.

And Moore said he will continue to press the city commission for answers, particularly in regard to Owensboro Municipal Utilities rate increases. The commission has final approval on OMU's proposed electric and water rate increases.

"I don't quite understand how people arrive at their decisions, but I congratulate Olive and Waymond," Moore said. "I wish them well and ask to be a little more open to the ratepayers and the taxpayers. If we get that, I kinda won."

The theme of Miller's campaign was to run the city without debt. The 55-year-old chiropractor opposed a downtown marina and the Greenbelt walking path as frivolous and unnecessary.

"I am very concerned about the debt the city is building slowly and insidiously," Miller said. "I was a little bit surprised that the taxpayers were not looking for someone with many, many years of business background."

But even though he has lived in Owensboro 32 years, Miller said "I'm relatively unknown and have kept a relatively low profile."

Burroughs is only the fourth woman to sit on the city commission, and the first to sit on the board in 14 years. Along with commissioners Alan Braden and Howard Whitehouse, Burroughs joins the first African American elected to the commission, the Rev. R.L. McFarland.

The first female city commissioner was Evelyn Waltrip Williams, who joined the board in 1969 to fill out the rest of the term of her husband, Doug Williams, who died in office.

Claudia Myles, who served from 1976 through 1979, was the first woman be elected to the commission. The last woman to sit on the city commission was Ann Murphy Kincheloe in 1980-81.

Though she is new to the commission, Burroughs appreciated the public's vote of confidence.

"It takes a while to understand the process, and I'll probably spend this year getting a good understanding of everything," Burroughs said. "It takes a long time to understand the budget process and all the workings of city government. I feel after this year I will be on solid ground to where I can be just a darn good city commissioner."



Olive Burroughs, seen here with her grandchildren, Taylor Burroughs, 4, and Courtland Burroughs, 5, made history Tuesday as the first African American woman to be elected to the Owensboro City Commission.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 29 May 1996, p.1A:



Olive Burroughs, right, gets a hug from her mother, Minnie James, after it was announced on television that Tuesday's nonpartisan Owensboro City Burroughs was the leading vote-getter in Commission primary.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 6 November 1996, p.8A:

Owensboro City Commission Race

CITY COMMISSION RESULTS	
Braden	6,283
Burroughs <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8,337
Johnson	6,735
Kurtz	5,931
McFarland	4,402
Moore <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8,892
Van Winkle <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7,086
Wood <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6,865



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 5 January 1997, p.1G:



Owensboro City Commission member Olive Burroughs, second from right, said women must change the way they look at and think of themselves in order to do their part in changing society's attitudes about women's traditional responsibilities at home, in the workplace and in elected office.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 16 April 2002, p.1B & 3B:

Candidate profile

Burroughs pushes for better jobs, drug abuse counseling

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Olive Burroughs got her first taste of politics in 1967 as a 17-year-old high school student, handing out campaign literature in front of the old Value Village store in Wesleyan Park Plaza in Wendell Ford's successful race for lieutenant governor.

"I've been actively involved in politics since that time," she said.

But in 1967, no one would have imagined that Burroughs would be an Owensboro city commissioner today.

No woman - and no black person of either gender - had ever been elected to the City Commission.

But that didn't dampen Burroughs' enthusiasm for politics.

"I worked in other people's campaigns," she said. "I served as a precinct chairman and (in 1988) Mayor David Adkisson appointed me to serve" on the commission, drafting a document for the proposed merger of the governments of Owensboro, Whitesville and Daviess County.

Voters rejected that document in 1990. But Burroughs' appetite for working in government had been whetted.

In 1993, she ran for city commissioner, finishing fifth in an eight-person field. There are only four commissioners.

But city commissioners turned to Burroughs in May 1995, when Mayor David Adkisson resigned to become president of the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc., and Mayor Pro-Tem Waymond Morris was named mayor.

Commissioners decided that the fairest thing to do to fill Morris' seat on the commission was to pick the No. 5 finisher in the last election.

Burroughs was appointed to the seat that May and won it at the polls in November. And she continued to win it in 1996, 1998 and 2000.

Now, she's running for her fourth full term.

"I felt the city needed a female perspective and an African-American perspective," Burroughs said. "There was a push (in 1993) for more females to run for office."

So far, she said, she hasn't found many distinct women's issues in city government.

"I would like to find more women's issues and work on those," Burroughs said. "Child care is a big issue for women. I'd like to see a child care facility in or near MidAmerica Airpark."

She said she plans to focus the campaign on "human development issues."

"The No. 1 issue in Owensboro is jobs," Burroughs said. "We need jobs that pay more than \$8 an hour."

In 1999, BellSouth announced that it was eliminating 53 directory assistance jobs here that paid an average of \$16 an hour and would hire 60 people at an average of \$8 an hour.

Burroughs, who was three years away from being eligible to retire as a directory assistance operator, took a pay cut of more than 50 percent to stay with the company, she said.

"I know how hard it is to live on \$8 an hour," Burroughs said. "These wages are pathetic. Companies have to share the wealth. A lot of people are just existing."

Burroughs said she wants to see the old labor-management committee in Owensboro "rejuvenated to work for economic development. We need to create a united front in going after industry."

She said approximately 20 percent of low-income workers who qualify for earned income tax credits don't apply for them.

"We need to get the word out about that," she said. "That's up to \$4,000 a person that could be coming into the community and it could help stimulate the economy."

Burroughs said she also wants to work to secure a local residential substance abuse treatment center.

"We're not providing the treatment that's needed in this community," she said. "We have to create an environment where people aren't ashamed to seek treatment. Substance abuse is an epidemic in this community."

Burroughs said the recent stand the City Commission took against a casino bill in the legislature was because the casinos would only be allowed at horse tracks. Henderson would have one, but Owensboro would be denied a casino license.

"I think the people of Kentucky and the people of Owensboro should be allowed to vote on the issue," she said.

Burroughs said the new parks and riverfront development masterplans contain "so many things we can't afford."

She said she wants to create a partnership with civic groups and businesses to help fund some of those projects.

"We could put out a list of our needs and see if there is any interest in partnering with us," Burroughs said. "That could allow things to happen a lot sooner."

And, she said, "I'd like to see us move forward with a youth sports commission to make use of all the facilities in the community. Some churches have recreation centers that are open to the community, but people don't know about them. We need to coordinate recreation."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 6 November 2002, p.1A:

Mattingly
and Davis in;
incumbent
Burroughs
defeated

City Commission	
(☆ denotes winner)	
☆Charlie Castlen	7,942
☆Jim Wood	7,073
☆Mimi Davis	6,882
Olive Burroughs	6,373
Tommy Howard	5,835
☆Alfred S. Mattingly Jr.	7,497
Danny Maglinger	4,771
Billy Pogue	3,749
Charlotte Burdette (write-in)	706

(The top four vote-getters will be on the City Commission.)



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 7 June 2003, pp.1A & 2A:

**Cancer
takes life
of former
city official
Burroughs**
Friends recall efforts
to aid progress, youths



**Olive
Burroughs**

By Joy Campbell, Messenger-Inquirer

Olive Burroughs, the first black woman elected to public office in Owensboro and Daviess County, died from complications of cancer at 6 a.m. Friday at Owensboro Mercy Health System. She was 52.

Burroughs was diagnosed in mid-April and had been undergoing radiation and chemotherapy to treat a tumor near her heart, lungs and trachea, and another on her stomach.

An Owensboro City Commissioner from 1995 until last year, Burroughs retired from BellSouth and recently had earned her real estate license. She said in April that she had been looking forward to a new career.

Burroughs was appointed to fill out Waymond Morris' term when he became mayor in 1995 and was later elected to terms in 1996, 1998 and 2000. She was only the second black and fourth woman to hold those leadership seats.

Morris said Friday he had lost not only a former colleague but a good friend.

"She and (her husband) Jimmy were close friends of (my wife) Alice and myself - we enjoyed each other's company."

Morris praised Burroughs' work to get more youths involved in city programs, her support of a bond issue that financed a new fire station, southwest park and drainage work on Scherm Road. "Those were 3-2 votes," he said.

Two years ago Burroughs joined the mayor in supporting user fees to fund a series of drainage projects identified in the storm water master plan. They were on the losing end of the 3-2 vote for that issue.

Morris said he always appreciated her support of annexation and industry incentives.

"She was a wonderful lady and very progressive," Morris said. "This is just sad."

In January, Burroughs and Mayor Waymond Morris entertained a crowd at an H.L. Neblett Community Center fund-raiser as Sonny and Cher. He enjoyed her sense of humor.

"When Ollie was desperately ill in the hospital in April, one of the last things she said before her surgery was, 'Goodbye Sonny,' " Morris said.

City Manager Ron Payne said Friday that City Hall was somber after learning of Burroughs' death.

"We will lower the city flags to half-staff in her honor; she was a close friend to all of us here," Payne said.

Payne said he would remember Burroughs' smile and her pleasant personality but foremost her desire to always do what was best for the city.

"I saw her wrestle with so many issues, but the bottom line was she always did what was best for Owensboro," Payne said. "Ollie was a team player, and a lot of people held that against her. Not much in the last seven years would have happened without her support."

Burroughs often found herself the swing vote on key issues on the five-member commission. One of her last votes was in the majority of a 3-2 vote to approve Sunday liquor sales for qualifying restaurants. She said that was her most difficult decision as a commissioner.

She also voted to name the new extension of Southtown Boulevard in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., another 3-2 vote.

"When it came to the Martin Luther King naming, I think she made a great contribution to that," said the Rev. Larry Lewis, pastor of Zion Baptist Church. "I think this is a great loss to the city - she contributed tremendously to the well-being of our city."

Lewis said she paved the way for black women in public office.

In a 1995 interview on her first day on the job, Burroughs credited her mother, Minnie James, as the true influence in her life. At that time James was a crossing guard. Burroughs recalled her mother's role as a Brownie leader for more than 30 years and her active participation in church and community.

In an interview from her hospital bed in April, Burroughs said she was worried about her mother. James has had serious health problems in recent years, and Burroughs had been her primary caregiver.

Friends and family members said putting others above herself was typical of Burroughs.

"Ollie was the only adult who took the time to talk to me and give me instructions for facing life's difficulties while I struggled through my teen years," said Deborah Groves, Burroughs' niece. "After moving to Kansas City 28 years ago, I have faced many challenges and, whenever my back was against the wall, I could call Ollie, and no matter how busy she was, she would always take the time to listen to my problem and advise me accordingly."

Groves said she recalled that Burroughs told her in 1996 that America teaches us how to win, not how to lose, but losing isn't always the end of the road. She reminded her that Abraham Lincoln lost more elections than he won, but the one that he won was the one he's still known for.

"Ollie lost her battle with cancer, but she won her fight for life," Groves said.

Burroughs was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Owensboro Youth Council. In her last term, she was working to establish a network to track young people who leave the city for greater opportunities and inform them of local job openings.

Burroughs served on the task force that recommended establishing neighborhood advisory boards, and in 1988 served on the Urban County Charter Commission that was charged with developing a document for merging city and county governments.

She got her first taste of politics as a high school senior in 1967, handing out campaign material for Wendell Ford's lieutenant governor's race. She stayed active in local and state campaigns after that.

Burroughs is survived by her husband, Jimmy Burroughs; daughter Yager Lewis; son Courtney Burroughs; foster son Kris Crawford; mother Minnie James and several grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements are pending.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 8 June 2003, p.2C:

Olive James Burroughs



Olive James Burroughs, 52, of 3206 Bobwhite Ave., Owensboro, died Friday, June 6, 2003, at Owensboro Mercy Health System. She was born in Owensboro and retired from BellSouth and was a licensed Realtor with Century 21 Partners. She was a member of Fourth Street Baptist Church and attended Bridgepoint Church in Owensboro. She was a former city commissioner and past president of the H.L. Neblett Center Board and several community boards. She enjoyed spending time with family, cooking, politics, rollerblading, bicycling, reading and serving in the community. She was preceded in death by her father, Leroy James Sr.

Survivors include her husband of 34 years, Jimmy Burroughs; two sons, Courtney V. Burroughs and Kris Crawford, both of Owensboro; a daughter, Yager Burroughs Lewis of Owensboro; her mother, Mrs. Minnie L. James; seven grandchildren, Courtland C. Burroughs, Tailor E. Burroughs, Kaleb S. Lewis, Treyson Rates Lewis, Missionary S. Burroughs, Jalen Crawford and Malik Crawford; two brothers, Lawrence James of Columbia, S.C., and Leroy H. James Jr. of Owensboro; a sister, Anita L. James of Owensboro; and a host of nieces and nephews.

Funeral services are at 1 p.m. Wednesday at Fourth Street Baptist Church in Owensboro. Burial will be in Owensboro Memorial Gardens. Visitation is from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday at Fourth Street Baptist Church. McFarland Funeral Home in Owensboro is in charge of arrangements.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 10 June 2003, p.7A (editorial):

Burroughs opened doors for others

At Friday night's NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet, best-selling author Crystal Kuykendall moved the crowd with her message about how all of us can inspire hope in children who too often believe their race, gender or socioeconomic status make life's high road unattainable.

That same night, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People named former Owensboro City Commissioner Olive Burroughs recipient of its Herman E. Floyd Award in honor of her service to the community.

Burroughs wasn't there to accept the honor. She passed away early that morning from complications in her battle against cancer.

But it was a fitting tribute, because Burroughs was – and will continue to be – one of the "merchants of hope" that Kuykendall described in her speech. Burroughs was a trailblazer, a role model for blacks – particularly black women – and an example of how doors can be opened for those willing to push their way through.

In 1995, Burroughs was appointed to the City Commission, replacing Waymond Morris after he became mayor. She was elected to the seat in 1996, becoming the second black – and the first black woman – elected to office in Owensboro or Daviess County. She was also only the fourth woman to hold a seat on the City Commission.

History shows that those who clear the way for others rarely travel a smooth path. It was no different for Burroughs, who always had her fair share of critics. Some said she was merely a pawn of the mayor's, almost always forming a voting block with Morris. Others claimed she forgot her roots and too often ignored the black community when it came to setting public policy.

Like any criticism, if one looks hard enough there's probably some truth to be found. But to accept such criticism is to ignore all that Burroughs accomplished in her seven years as a city leader. Burroughs was part of a commission that saw the completion of a parks master plan, the start of riverfront development, the implementation of Decision 2002 infrastructure enhancements and the involvement of public in government through neighborhood advisory boards.

She's credited with being a driving force behind renaming the Southtown Boulevard extension in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. And she was the deciding vote in favor of Sunday alcohol sales, a vote that will benefit this community in the long term, even though it likely helped end Burroughs' political career.

Right now, thoughts go to Burroughs' family and mourning her loss. In the broader perspective, however, her passing is another blow to leadership in the black community. Recent years have seen the loss of the Rev. Herman E. Floyd; the Rev. R.L. McFarland; his son, Richard McFarland Jr.; and now Burroughs.

It will be important that new leaders emerge, that new role models step forward. For Burroughs, inspiration came from her mother, Minnie James. She said in an interview some years ago that her mother's activism in the church and the community was what drove her to be a leader.

Burroughs' own desire to give back undoubtedly has helped others to find that high road in life, to not accept that skin color or gender or anything else has to be the barrier that society has long set up.

The impact that such efforts had on this community may not be evident for some time. But opening doors in local government, more than any single vote she cast, will be her legacy.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 12 June 2003, pp.1A & 2A



By Justin Willis, Messenger-Inquirer

Friends and relatives crowded Fourth Street Baptist Church on Wednesday to celebrate the life of a woman who challenged the city to become greater, faced adversity with determination and died too young Friday at the age of 52.

More than 300 people lined the church pews to remember Olive James Burroughs, whom most residents will remember as the first black woman to be elected to the Owensboro City Commission. Burroughs is survived by her husband, three children and seven grandchildren.

Owensboro Mayor Waymond Morris, who worked with Burroughs for about seven years on the City Commission, considered Burroughs a leader in the community and a good personal friend with a shared vision.

"She was a commissioner who worked hard to make Owensboro a better place to live," Morris said.

"She was a team player and, I think above all, that was one of her great gifts. She was a true leader, a great lady. She will be missed by the African-American community and all of Owensboro."

While a city commissioner, Burroughs worked hard to bring industrial development to the city, increased efforts to fight drugs in the community and strengthened the city police and fire departments, Morris said. Burroughs worked hard to honor Martin Luther King Jr., and supported using his name for the loop near south Frederica Street.

Burroughs came of age during the 1950s and 1960s, when the nation struggled out of segregation and toward improvements in civil rights, said State Sen. David Boswell, a Sorgho

Democrat. The era was one marked by great racial disturbances, but Burroughs emerged inspired to improve race relations, Boswell said.

"We saw a lot of things happen in this nation of ours," Boswell said. "She was a brave lady, a pioneer, a visionary to this community and this commonwealth."

Burroughs was a member of Fourth Street Baptist and had been attending BridgePointe Church with Pastor Todd Camp, who opened the service with a prayer, following a song by Jon Brennan.

Most friends knew her as "Ollie," said Camp. Many in the pews had either been affected by her work as a commissioner or influenced by her character, he said.

"I guess our question is, 'What now, Father?' " Camp said in his prayer. "What do you want us to learn from this death?"

Alma Randolph and Brennan followed Camp's words with a duet of "Amazing Grace."

Burroughs was diagnosed with cancer in mid-April and had been undergoing radiation and chemotherapy to treat a tumor near her heart, lungs and trachea, and another on her stomach. She died at 6 a.m. Friday at Owensboro Mercy Health System.

The Rev. Larry Lewis said the reason for Burroughs' early death is not expected to be understood by those in attendance at the service. Only God knows why, he said.

Burroughs stood her ground for causes she believed in and did not waver from them, Lewis said. Her principles and strength were noble, whether or not someone disagreed with her cause, he said. One cannot serve God without serving humanity, he said.

Burroughs supported a bond issue that financed a new fire station, southwest park and drainage work on Scherm Road. Burroughs often found herself the swing vote on key issues on the five-member commission. One of her last votes was in the majority of a 3-2 vote to approve Sunday liquor sales for restaurants, which she said was her most difficult decision as a commissioner.

"She did a wonderful job as a city commissioner," Lewis said. "A lot of people may not agree with me. Who cares?"

Burroughs' pallbearers included three officers each from the city and fire departments. She was buried at Owensboro Memorial Gardens.

Burroughs served on the task force that recommended establishing neighborhood advisory boards. In 1988 she served on the Urban County Charter Commission that was charged with developing a document for merging city and county governments.

She got her first taste of politics as a high school senior in 1967, handing out campaign material for Wendell Ford's lieutenant governor's race.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 14 February 2022:

Voice for the People: Burroughs,
first Black woman on city commission,
left lasting mark

By Jim Mayse, Messenger-Inquirer

When Olive Burroughs would go out campaigning for Owensboro city commissioner, she would take her children along to help hand out literature and meet with people who answered Burroughs' knock at the door.

Burroughs' son, Kris Crawford, was never very enthusiastic about the work.

"I used to complain every time we would go walk precincts," Crawford recalled. "I would complain every day."

But when Crawford would voice his displeasure, Burroughs had an answer.

"She would say, 'You are going to thank me one day,' " Crawford said.

Turns out, Burroughs was right. Burroughs, who was the first Black woman elected to the city commission, had an impact on Crawford that eventually helped him in his own run for office. Today, Crawford is the first Black constable elected in Daviess County.

"I use the same guidelines she used to run her election," which included, tell voters what you can do, but don't overpromise, ask for a person's vote, always tell voters the truth, Crawford said.

"She was great for the city," Crawford said. "Truly, if she hadn't passed away, she would have been mayor."

Olive James Burroughs was first appointed to the city commission in 1995, to fill the unexpired term of Waymond Morris, who had been elected mayor. Burroughs ran successfully for commissioner in 1996, 1998 and 2000.

Former Mayor Ron Payne was city manager when Burroughs was a commissioner. Payne said Burroughs was instrumental in creating the city's Neighborhood Alliances, which are active today.

"Olive was very, very supportive of doing that, and really led the charge to get it done," Payne said. While some people dismissed the neighborhood alliance idea, "Olive thought it would be wonderful to give the neighborhoods the opportunity to work with the city, and the city the opportunity to work with the neighborhoods.

"We wouldn't have that without her support."

Burroughs had three children, sons Crawford and Courtney Burroughs and daughter Yager Burroughs Lewis. Burroughs Lewis said her mother worked hard for the city — she knocked on doors to help get voters to the polls and debated and worked to convince her fellow commissioners about city issues, and she was constantly involved in projects. Burroughs Lewis said she remembers seeing blueprints for improvements to the Owensboro riverfront spread out on the kitchen table.

"She truly cared about what each person had to say," Burroughs Lewis said. If a person had a concern, Burroughs was there to listen and help.

"Whatever we were doing, wherever we were at, she took her job seriously," Burroughs Lewis said. "She cared deeply about our citizens and their concerns.

"Watching her address those issues made me very proud of her."

Jimmy Burroughs and Olive Burroughs were married for 34 years before Olive died of cancer on June 6, 2003. She was 52.

Jimmy Burroughs said when Olive first decided to run for office in 1993, he worried about how they would balance the daily demands of family life with a political career. Burroughs lost the 1993 campaign, but she wasn't discouraged.

"She didn't like what she was seeing in Owensboro, especially with young people," Jimmy Burroughs said.

Her interest in young people led to the creation of the Owensboro Youth Summit, which drew hundreds of students for a day of discussions geared toward helping them think about, and prepare for, the future.

"My wife said, 'You can be part of the problem, or you can be part of the solution,' " he said, noting that Olive knew how to work with city officials, to bring them over to her side.

"She said, 'I'm a voice for the people, but I only have one vote, so you have to persuade the other commissioners,'" he said.

Payne said Burroughs was involved in a number of projects, including the construction of the OPD station on West Ninth Street and a new fire station. Major efforts to improve drainage and reduce flooding in the city were done while Burroughs was a member of the commission.

Burroughs had her hand in several projects "you can't see," such as drainage improvements under the streets, Payne said.

"She loved her city, and she wanted to see it do well," he said.

Burroughs lost her commission seat in 2002. Jimmy Burroughs said he thinks Olive's vote to approve Sunday liquor sales by the drink in August 2002 hurt her politically and at least partially led to her losing her reelection campaign that fall.

"She said, 'I know it's a hard decision, and I need to pray on things,' " Jimmy Burroughs recalled.

The commission's work on growth and expansion led to the riverfront the city has today, Jimmy Burroughs said.

"I wish she was around to see what would happen on the riverfront," he said.

Burroughs Lewis said she sees the results of her mother's work every day.

"I always tell my kids and grandkids; I'll drive around the city and say, 'Your grandmother had a part in that, your great-grandmother had a part in that,' " Burroughs Lewis said. "There are just so many memories of her diligently dedicating herself. Her kitchen table was her office."

Former city commissioner Mayor Pro Tem Pam Smith-Wright said she and Olive were friends and neighbors as children and in high school. As a city commissioner, Burroughs would advocate for her ideas to her fellow commissioners.

"I respect the fact that she stood tall and did her job and represented women, especially women of color, with dignity," Smith-Wright said.



Profile of Olive James Burroughs

- born in Owensboro, KY on 24 September 1950
- graduate off Owensboro High School and Owensboro Business College
- while attending the Owensboro Business College she was the editor of the college's newspaper, OBC-Scene
- telephone operator for South Central Bell Telephone Co.
- president of the H.L. Neblett Community Center Board
- president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute
- treasurer and political action chairwoman of the Owensboro chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- secretary / vice-president of Owensboro Central Labor Council
- member of board of directors / secretary / vice-resident of the Cliff Hagan Boys Club

- secretary of the local Communication Workers of America
- member of the National Association of Human Rights Workers
- member of the Kentucky African-American Heritage Commission
- treasurer of the Owensboro Human Relations Commission
- regional representative for Leadership Black Kentucky
- alternate for Owensboro-Daviess County Labor-Management Committee
- executive board member of the Owensboro Human Relations Commission board of directors
- 1988-89 class of Leadership Owensboro
- Owensboro Mercy Health System Institutional Review Board
- Government Structure Committee
- member of the RiverPark Center board of directors
- Urban County Charter Commission member
- co-chairwoman of Josiah Henson play committee
- member of founding committee of Owensboro Black Expo
- Free Clinic of Owensboro, Inc. board of directors
- member of the Daviess County School System Strategic Planning Committee
- member of the Junior League of Owensboro
- first Black woman to serve on Owensboro City Commission
- recipient of 2020 Athena Award



Owensboro Memorial Gardens, Owensboro, Daviess County, KY