



Remembering Ada B. Evans

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By Linda Bjorklund - Special to The Flume



It was a routine biennial election in the Town of Fairplay. The year was 1974 and that year there was a bit of competition, but Ada B.

Evans was declared the winner with 65 votes. The other two candidates had 49 and 45 votes.

What was left to other news sources throughout the country to report was the fact that Evans was the first black female mayor to be popularly elected in the State of Colorado.

Ada Belle Huff was born in a small rural community in Aiken County, S.C. She was the first person in her community to go to high school and then to college in Columbia. She met Ray Evans, her spouse of 50 years, in Aiken where she did her student teaching.

Although both were college graduates, they had difficulty in finding jobs. After a time in Los Angeles, they came to Colorado because they were told that there were opportunities here.

There was not much in Denver except substitute teaching, but Ray was offered a full-time teaching position in Fairplay.

Evans and her daughters, Rachelle and Cheri, soon followed him. With his degree in music, Ray became the music instructor and band director.

Ada then became a science teacher in Fairplay at the same school. Hartsel Fire Chief Jay Hutcheson was a high school student in Fairplay during those years and he remembers her as one of his teachers.

According to Hutcheson, she assigned students the task of conducting a traffic study to see how motorists reacted to the presence of official police cars in the vicinity.

So, the students stood along the highway and took notes. Sure enough, cars sped up when there was no law enforcement and slowed down when there was.

The Evans family had been in Fairplay for eight years when Ada's fellow teachers and other friends encouraged her to run for Mayor of the town.

When she campaigned, Evans cited the need for the town's streets to be paved. Although the main highway through town had been

resurfaced in 1936, the rest of the streets were dusty and rough.

She added to her goals the need for limited growth, perhaps from new light industry. And she thought the town should expand and add recreational facilities.

Daughter Rachelle Evans Burrell recalls that she was an eleven-year old sixth grader when the family first learned of her mother's decision to run for mayor.

Her dad laughed and said "if she won he'd be the first man of the city."

When Ada was declared the winner, one of the other teachers drove to their home and noisily honked her horn before she came inside to celebrate.

Although Ada had campaigned on the issue of paving the town's streets, she realized that she didn't want to increase taxes or put on any new taxes to get it done.

She explored the possibilities of revenue sharing and other outside sources of funding. Although the streets didn't get paved during her time as mayor, that eventually happened.

And her ideas to add recreational facilities came to fruition years later when the South Park Recreation Center was built.

Evans ran unopposed for the office of mayor in the 1976 election. One of the issues that came up during her four years was the need to update the town's water pipes, and that project was in progress when the next mayor, Brian Woodward, took office in 1978.

Woodward recalls that he, along with the rest of the town, had the "utmost respect for her."

He also remembers Ray Evans fondly. But then, Woodward and Ray shared a love of music, as Woodward is well known for his singing and guitar playing.

After her years as mayor, Ada Evans worked as a case manager for Park County Social Services.

The family had resided in Colorado for 40 years before they moved back to Winston-Salem, N.C. in 2001. On June 3, 2011, Ada Evans passed away at her home there.

Burrell recently shared some of her memories about growing up in Fairplay. One of her comments was, "If you grow up the only black in a small white town in the 1970s, you can't see the world in black and white but lots of shades of grey."