

REMEMBER, REFLECT  
& CELEBRATE.

50 years of the  
*Tennessee Human Rights Commission*



**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Commemorative Celebration**  
Tennessee Human Rights Commission

February 5, 2013  
Beck Cultural Exchange Center  
Knoxville, TN

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## 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

### **Welcome**

Beverly L. Watts, Executive Director

### **Remarks from 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee Co-Chair**

Commissioner Patricia Pierce

### **Honoring of *Civil Rights Advocates***

Commissioner Patricia Pierce

Commissioner Ruby Miller

### **Remember, Reflect & Celebrate: The Tennessee Human Rights Commission**

Beverly L. Watts, Executive Director



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We acknowledge our sponsors & partners  
with sincere gratitude and thanks

- ◆ Ruby Miller, State Farm of Oak Ridge, TN
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- ◆ Knoxville Area Urban League
- ◆ Vote 70, Inc.

# Civil Rights Advocates

**Ms. Shirley Carr Clowney** - Executive Director of the African Americans of Appalachia and Blount County organization, Ms. Clowney made a significant impact by documenting life of African Americans in the area. She was a member of the Maryville Six, who re-integrated Maryville College after 50 years in 1954.

**Ms. Gloria Garner** - Retired Vice President of the Knoxville Area Urban League (KAUL), Ms. Garner helped chart the course for the KAUL in 1968 and held many positions there until her retirement in 2004. Ms. Garner has helped hundreds of African Americans gain access to jobs in Knoxville and Oak Ridge.

**Ms. Rita Geier** - Ms. Geier was the named plaintiff in the historic lawsuit that desegregated the Tennessee higher education system. The lawsuit resulted in the merger of former University of Tennessee at Nashville with TSU. The full resolution in 2001 provided over \$77 million to TSU and other state institutions.

**The Highlander Research & Education Center** - Through workshops and training sessions, the Center has been an incubator for the Civil Rights Movement. The Montgomery bus boycott, the Citizenship Schools, and the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee all have roots at the Center.

**Rev. Dr. Harold Middlebrook** - Rev. Middlebrook was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement through his participation in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Some of his efforts include registering new voters after the Voting Rights Act passed and the Sanitation Workers Strike in Memphis. He also chaired the MLK Jr. Commemoration Commission of Knoxville until 2000.

**Mr. Wilbert Minter** - Former Oak Ridge City Council member, vice mayor, and member of Tennessee Black Caucus, Mr. Minter has had a great impact on Tennesseans. His accomplishments include establishing a public transportation system for elderly and less fortunate; spearheading the identification and registration of an African American Cemetery on Oak Ridge Reservation and organizing several MLK events in Oak Ridge. He was also elected to the Tennessee Council on Human Relations in 1973 and served on the United States Commission on Civil Rights.

**Ms. Elizabeth Peelle** - Ms. Peelle has been very involved with civil and human rights in Oak Ridge for over 40 years. A retired scientist from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, she was involved in the Race Relations committee of the YWCA and continues to be a civil rights advocate. She is also a long-time organizer for the annual MLK program in Oak Ridge.

**Mr. Dewey Roberts** - Mr. Roberts led many programs to make Knoxville a safer and inclusive community as Knoxville NAACP President. He also served on the Board of Directors for East TN Race Relations Center and is a Former Chair of the Knox County Taskforce on Hate Crimes and Great Schools Partnership.

**Mr. Avon William Rollins, Sr.** - Mr. Rollins has been highly involved in furthering the civil rights of Tennesseans through many efforts. During his time at TVA, he directed investments in the minority community. He was deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement as a co-founder of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. He is the current Executive Director of the Beck Cultural Exchange Center.

**Ms. Ruth Smiley** - Ms. Smiley has furthered women's rights and access to higher education as President on the state and local level of the American Association of University Women. A retired educator, she has also mentored several women students.



## Tennessee Human Rights Commission History & Overview

On September 30, 1963, Governor Frank G. Clement signed Executive Order 18 creating the Tennessee Human Relations Commission. At that time, the Commission's purpose was to advise the public on their human rights, researching and making reports on human relations and reporting these findings to the Governor. The Commission accomplished this by working closely with other governmental agencies with similar duties. In 1967, legislation was passed creating the Tennessee Commission on Human Development which absorbed the duties of the previous Commission, adopted rules and regulations to govern its proceedings and added a prohibition against sex discrimination.

In 1978, the Tennessee Human Rights Act (THRA) became law transforming the Commission from an advisory agency to an enforcement agency. Current Commissioner Jocelyn Wurzburg of Memphis, TN was the author of this legislation and her leadership was critical to its passage. In 1979 and 1980, the law was amended to include disability and age as protected classes. In 1983, the Commission officially became the Tennessee Human Rights Commission (THRC). In 1984, the law was amended to prohibit discrimination in housing. In 1990, the expansion was extended to include familial status and disability as protected classes. Today, the THRA prohibits discrimination based on race, color, creed, religion, sex, age (employment only), disability, familial status (housing only) and national origin. In 2009, the THRA was expanded to give authority to verify that state governmental entities comply with requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI). Title VI prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of race, color or national origin.

THRC has had collaborative partnerships with the federal government for more than 30 years. In 1979 the Commission partnered with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission through an employer monitoring grant; now expanded into a Work Share agreement. In 1994, THRC partnered with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a substantially equivalent agency. These relationships allow the Commission to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Title VIII of the Fair Housing Act.

The mission of the THRC is to safeguard individuals from discrimination through enforcement and education. The THRA and Tennessee Disability Act are enforced through receiving, mediating, investigating, conciliating and, when necessary, litigating allegations of discrimination. Since 2009, the Commission has also coordinated the state of Tennessee's compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Commission uses a variety of public meetings, outreach events and resources to educate the public about their rights.

The Commission executes its mission through a 15 member Board of Commissioners and staff of 29 in four offices (Nashville, Memphis, Chattanooga and Knoxville). In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, the Commission received 1,118 inquiries, accepted 681 as complaints and closed 559 cases. Through 10 Rule 31 trained mediators, the Commission has operated a successful Mediation Program since its reactivation in 2008. During 2011-2012 fiscal year, the Commission had a 50% success rate in mediations, awarding nearly \$97,000 in monetary benefits and non-monetary benefits including letters of apology, policy changes, training, promotions and uncontested unemployment.