

The Augusta Chronicle

Rosa T. Beard, longtime teacher, dies

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Augusta resident Sandra Wimberly last spoke to Rosa T. Beard this week.

"I've always told her I wanted to be like her when I grow up. I said, 'I'm still striving to be like you, but I've still got a ways to go,' " Wimberly said of the woman she describes as a lifelong friend and second mother.

Beard, an educator who will be remembered for her half-century of youth leadership, died Thursday at Hillandale Hospital in Lithonia, Ga. She was 89.

She was a former chemistry teacher at T.W. Josey High School and the founder of the Rosa T. Beard Debutante Club for Girls, which she ran from 1963 until 2009.

In 1966, she was named Josey High School's Teacher of the Year for her work advising a student Rocket Club. Club members built rockets that won awards in several science fairs, including one from the U.S. Patent Office. Members went on to pursue careers in science and government and became doctors, military officers, ministers, an ambassador and a Superior Court judge.

Wimberly said she first met Beard as a ninth-grade student. She remembers her as a dedicated teacher who commanded attention.

"There was no shucking and jiving in her class. You needed to understand what was going on, and if you didn't you were expected to ask questions," Wimberly said.

Wimberly joined Beard's debutante club as a teenager and became an adviser in 1994. The group holds a formal cotillion dance every April, a coming-of-age ceremony that introduces girls into society. The club's activities go beyond etiquette lessons.

"We were able to do things we would not otherwise have done," Wimberly said.

"There were social events and picnics, workshops to teach us about medical and financial issues. It prepared us to be adults and to be responsible. We were taught to give back to the community."

Beard attended every cotillion dance except the one in 2007, which she missed to attend a granddaughter's graduation in Florida, Wimberly said.

"She was a giving, caring, sharing person. There's not a person she would meet who she wouldn't be willing to help," she said.

Beard was a member of Antioch Baptist Church and a board member of Shiloh Comprehensive Community Center.

W.H. Mays Mortuary is in charge of Beard's funeral arrangements.

Links:

[1] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/editorial/images/feed/msms/photos/4569247.jpg>

[2] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/editorial/images/feed/msms/photos/4569145.jpg>

[3] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/editorial/images/feed/msms/photos/4569150.jpg>

[4] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/superphoto/rosa4.jpg>

[5] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/rosa4.jpg>

[6] http://chronicle.augusta.com/sites/default/files/thumbnail_square/ROSA6.jpg

[7] <http://chronicle.augusta.com/news/education/2010-02-23/museum-honors-teacher-who-led-rocket-club-josey-high-school>