

The Walton Tribune

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The Word

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart ..."

— Psalm 19:7-8

Deaths A7

Earl Lashley
Monroe

Rachel Elizabeth Studdard Lemonds
Monroe

Thurston back for another standout season

Max Thurston will be one of the key players for the Monroe Area High School football team as the Canes look to return to the state playoffs in 2023. See Thurston's story inside today's sports.

— B1



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Walton History

Woman who integrated local schools dies at 72

Dorcas Yvonne Jernigan entered MAHS in 1964-65

Stephanie Calabrese
Special to the Tribune

Dorcas Yvonne Jernigan, age 72, of Loganville, passed away on July 4, 2023.

Born on Feb. 28, 1951, to Flossie Etchison Hill and Albert Jernigan in Monroe, Dorcas was raised in Mon-

roe and lived in Walton County for most of her life.

She will forever be remembered for her courageous and pivotal role in desegregating Monroe Area High School during the 1964-1965 school year and admired for her strength, re-

silience and love for others.

As a young child, Dorcas learned the value of education and hard work by example of her maternal grandparents, Mollie Jackson Etchison and Artie Etchison. They owned a 400-acre farm in a com-

munity known as Split Silk (now Loganville). Mollie and Artie had 13 children.

Dorcas remembered stories that her mother and aunts told about having to work the fields during the harvest seasons.

See **Jernigan** » Page A3



Dorcas Yvonne Jernigan

Jernigan: 'God gave me the strength to bear it and rise above it..'

Continued from A1

Outside of the harvest seasons, they attended school. Her grandfather built Etchison School on his land for the Black children in the area, and hired and boarded a teacher during each school year. Five of the Etchison daughters went on to earn college degrees and all six of their sons were skilled machinists and builders who could construct and fix most things.



First MAHS yearbook photo

"We didn't have a lot, but we didn't lack either," shared Dorcas. Her life revolved around three things: school, church and family. At age eight, she was baptized by Pastor William Smith, who became a father-figure to her, at First African Baptist Church in Monroe. This began her lifelong dedication to the church and an unyielding faith – a faith she would need to carry her through a great challenge to come.

Growing up in Monroe in the Jim Crow era of the 1950s-60s was a challenging time for Dorcas and our Black community. Dorcas remembered feeling angry by the way she and her mother were treated at shops downtown; upset that restaurants wouldn't serve them; and hurt to be scolded for leaning in to drink the cold water from fountains marked by a sign for 'whites only.' During the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, her mother didn't allow Dorcas and her sister to get involved in the sit-ins for fear of them being arrested or harmed, but Dorcas wanted the same rights and privileges as the white teenagers who enjoyed sock hops and soda fountains. "It was just something that I didn't understand. I couldn't understand how people could treat other people that way."

As Dorcas neared her ninth grade year at Carver High School, the school for Black students in Monroe, a Morris Brown College student approached Dorcas and asked if she and fellow student Sallie Mae Robertson would be interested to attend Monroe Area High School (MAHS).

Without hesitation, Dorcas felt that she was ready for the challenge in spite of her parents' concern and fear that the decision might put their family in danger. Dorcas insisted that she

Celebration of life planned July 14

A celebration of life Dorcas Yvonne Jernigan is set for Friday, July 14, 2023 at 1 p.m. at First African Baptist Church, 130 Tyler Street, Monroe. Interment will be in Hill Haven Memory Gardens, 490 Edmondson Road, Monroe.

Viewing will be at Young-Levee Funeral Home Monroe Chapel on Thursday, July 13, from 12-8 p.m. with family hours from 6-8 p.m. In lieu of flowers the family asks that you offer donations to the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church Scholarship Fund in Dorcas Jernigan's name.



wanted to go, and eager to prove that she was capable of handling the academic rigor and any other challenges that might come her way. She had faith in herself and that God would protect her.

When Dorcas and Sallie Mae Robertson made their way to MAHS on the first day of school in the fall of 1964, everybody knew that they were coming. Dorcas remembered feeling anxious, but not scared. Crowds of people shouted "ugly things." The two young girls were escorted into the school, past the police and National Guard, by members of the NAACP and First African Baptist Deacon Otis Smith, but they were not permitted to enroll that day. Disappointed, they were told to return to Carver High School so the school could make preparation for them. Over the next six weeks, Dorcas underwent IQ tests and had conversations with the school superintendent, Clyde Pierce, and principal Charles Cochran. They wanted her to be sure that she was confident in her decision. Dorcas didn't flinch. Her decision changed the future of education in Walton County.

Dorcas shared that it wasn't an easy adjustment.

Her college preparatory curriculum classes were more accelerated, though she welcomed the challenge. She withstood prejudice and verbal abuse from fellow students as some teachers and administrators looked the other way. She shared, "God gave me the strength to bear it and rise above it, and focus on what I was there for." By her senior year, in 1969, she attained all As, graduated 13th in her class, and went on to attend Spelman College. She had earned the respect that she should

have had all along.

Dorcas worked in professional management positions throughout her career for Sears, Roebuck and Co., DeKalb County Jail, and *The Champion* Newspaper while raising her family. Since 1985, she served as the church clerk for First African Baptist Church, and most recently was a substitute teacher for the Walton County School System working with children of all ages. Beyond her career, church and family commitments, she was a dedicated community volunteer, serving as a past board member of FISH (Faith in Serving Humanity) and vice president of the Northwest Baptist Association with a focus on supporting youth.

In sharing her courageous story of school desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement, Dorcas has touched the hearts and minds of people across the nation, inspiring others in the continued pursuit of racial equality and justice. She was featured in "Black America Series: Walton County Georgia," a book by Lynn Robinson Camp and Jennifer E. Cheeks-Collins published in 2003, and in the award-winning documentary feature film UNSPOKEN by filmmaker Stephanie Calabrese which will soon be available to educational institutions and public libraries across the U.S. and Canada.

Dorcas was preceded in death by her sons Steven Jernigan and Craig Jernigan; and siblings Darryl Hill and Albert Jernigan, Jr. She is survived by her sons Brian Jernigan and Matthew Mangrum; grandchildren Bradford Jernigan, Yazmine Mangrum, Eva Jernigan, Jackson Jernigan, and Julian Jernigan; and siblings Carolyn Jernigan-Glenn, Harold Hill and Victoria Hill.