

# Former Atlantic City Councilwoman Barbara Hudgins has died

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ATLANTIC CITY — Friends and fellow politicians described Barbara Hudgins on Thursday as a straight-shooter, an advocate for the arts and someone who always put the people of the city first.

Hudgins, the first African-American woman to be elected to City Council, died earlier in the week. She was 81.

Ralph Hunter, founder of the African American Heritage Museum of Southern New Jersey, was a personal friend of Hudgins for many years.

“I knew her to be an advocate for the arts. She would often attend events at the museum and was a great supporter of the African-American museum,” Hunter said. “She was just a tremendous woman. ... She encouraged students to get their (high school) degree and head off to college.”

Hudgins was elected to council three times from 1990 through 2001. She won in her first bid for elected office.

During her time on council, Hudgins was credited with providing money for groups such as the Venice Park Civic Association and the African American Male Conference, as well as bringing a partnership specialist to the resort to generate a more accurate Census count.

In 2001, Hudgins was considered a contender for mayor but ultimately decided to run for a fourth term on council as an independent. She was unsuccessful.

Hudgins also ran for council in 2007.

She was one of three people nominated by the Atlantic City Democratic Committee to replace Mayor Bob Levy, who resigned in October 2007, but council selected longtime city firefighter Scott K. Evans to serve a term that expired in November 2008.

More recently, Hudgins was a member of then-Mayor-elect Frank Gilliam’s transition team in 2017. She also endorsed Gilliam for mayor.

Atlantic County Freeholder Ernest D. Coursey sent his condolences to Hudgins’ family and said her death was a tremendous loss for the entire community.

Coursey was one of the youngest members of council when he served with Hudgins from 1991 through 2001. He did an additional year after she left. He also served as her campaign manager for two elections.

“She had given back so much, not only being a school teacher in Atlantic City High School for 30 years, but mentored young men and women in the community,” Coursey said. “This community has lost a good friend, a fighter, one who I believe had the goal of always putting the people first.”

Bert Lopez, acting president of the Hispanic Alliance of Atlantic County, ran with Hudgins and late Mayor Jim Whelan on a “Unity Ticket” in 2001.

Lopez said he thought very highly of Hudgins and her contributions to the residents of Atlantic City.

“When I was running the Hispanic Alliance, she was always there as an advocate for the community, a pretty straight shooter. She didn’t mind standing up when she had to stand up. She spoke her mind. She was really a good person, who cared for the city and everyone in the city,” Lopez said.

Former Mayor Lorenzo Langford also served on council with Hudgins, at times as adversaries.

“There were times during our respective political careers that we were aligned in the same vein ... but more than the politics, the bond that we shared happened to be the fact that we were both alumni from the same institution, that being North Carolina Central University,” said Langford, who is a 1978 graduate.

Hudgins was a math teacher in Atlantic City schools for 30 years. She also was a past president of the Atlantic City Education Association.

While growing up in Durham, North Carolina, Hudgins attended segregated public schools and went on an academic scholarship to nearby North Carolina Central, a predominantly black college.

Hudgins moved to the resort in 1959 after marrying Atlantic City native Gene Hudgins, a basketball player with the Harlem Globetrotters, whom she met in the summer of 1957 while working as a waitress on Virginia Avenue.

She was affiliated with the National Conference of Christians and Jews, United Negro College Fund, Black United Fund and was the chairwoman of the Atlantic City Human Relations Commission. She also was on the trustee board at Union Baptist Temple.

She was recognized as one of five “Women Who Make A Difference” by Zonta International of Atlantic City in 2002 and was honored for her community service by the Southern New Jersey Chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.