

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Janet Purnell

PERSON

Purnell, Janet, 1936-2008

Alternative Names: Janet Purnell;

Life Dates: August 30, 1936-November 30, 2008

Place of Birth: Akron, Ohio, USA

Residence: Akron, Ohio

Occupations: Academic Administrator; Elementary School Principal; Elementary School Teacher

Biographical Note

Educator and minority advocate Janet Purnell was born in Akron, Ohio on August 30, 1936 and has been a life-long resident. She studied education at the University of Akron, where she earned both her B.S. (1959) and her M.S. (1971).

For twenty-two years, Purnell worked for the Akron Public Schools as both an elementary school teacher and principal. In 1967, she led alumni in successfully

lobbying for the establishment of an anti-segregation policy on the University of Akron campus. In 1982, she became the Executive Director of the Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority. In this role, she oversaw the public housing for 20,000 residents and served as a lobbyist on behalf of the 40 largest housing authorities. She later entered the private sector, acting as the CEO of Navic & Associates, where she served as a local and national consultant on establishing diversity in the workplace. In 1990, she returned to her alma mater to sit on the president's cabinet, overseeing all minority initiatives on campus. This position led to her subsequent role as the first Executive Director of Minority Development at the University. Purnell was responsible for securing funding to support minority initiatives and distributing annual scholarship funds to minority students. In honor of Purnell's appointment to chair the University of Akron's Board of Trustees, the Zeta Theta Omega Sorority established the Janet B. Purnell Project Self-Sufficiency Endowment, which annually awards a scholarship to a single mother.

Since 1985, she has provided leadership to historic preservation efforts in Akron. She designed and implemented the Dr. Shirla R. McClain Gallery of Akron's Black History and Culture program and spearheaded the establishment of the Gallery's endowment fund and curriculum guides. She has been a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority for over forty years; has acted a Trustee for the Akron Urban League and Akron Musical Association; serves as the Secretary of the Akron Chapter of the NAACP; is the Vice-Chairman of the Akron Black Women's Leadership Caucus and Chair of the Mt. Olive Baptist Church Trustee Ministry. In 2001, Purnell was honored as one of 100 outstanding women of Summit County. She is the mother of two sons.

Related Entries

North High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

University of Akron [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.S.

University of Akron [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

M.S.

Akron Public Schools [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1959 to 1970]

Elementary School Teacher

Akron Public Schools [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1972 to 1982]

Principal

Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 199608 to 200308]

Executive Director

University of Akron Shirla R. McClain Gallery
[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1985 to ?]

Founder

University of Akron [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1987 to 1990]

Interim Director of Minority Affairs

University of Akron [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to 1993]

Executive Director of Minority Development

Summit County Republican Party [MEMBEROF]
[from 1980 to 1991]

Vice Chairman

Alpha Kappa Alpha [MEMBEROF]
[from 1956 to 2008]

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