Community Mourns Homeless Advocate Kay Vives, Advocate for the people is sorely missed

By SHERIDAN HILL Chronicle Assistant Editor

The Piedmont is quietly mourning the death of its most outspoken advocate for homeless people. Activist Kay Vives, 55, died Oct. 16 at her sister's home in Charlotte. As a Legal Aid Society receptionist for 15 years, Vives regularly came in contact with the city's voiceless, and soon became the city's most outspoken advocate for the homeless. She was a regular at city hall, often taking the podium to remind bureaucrats that men, women and children were sleeping on street corners and crowding the city's meager emergency shelter facilities.

The community will long mourn the woman who is described by those who knew her as "a tireless warrior for the underdog ... the moving force of the homeless movement in the city...not just a foot soldier, but a major general for those who are without power."

Last week a memorial service for Vives was held at the Bethesda Center for the Homeless. She was buried in Charlotte.

Hazel Mack, a Legal Aid attorney who worked with her, remembered the first time she met Vives.

"We met across a fence. I was 18, and she was in the womens' prison in Raleigh. They (prisoners) had been demonstrating against conditions inside, and people came from all over the state to demonstrate in support of them. She had a rough and turbulent beginning. But all of that helped her never to forget," Mack said.

In the Legal Aid office and in the community, Vives frequently searched for ways to remedy the problems of the homeless.

"She looked out for the little things," Mack said. "She encouraged us to start a fund at the front desk for people who didn't have bus money. When a client died and had no money, she came up an idea for helping to pay for that, and we began to help with funerals."

Frank McKissick, a C.P.A and friend to Vives, noted that her concern for the plight of others was endless.

"She did a lot people never knew about," said McKissick. "She was always out there working for the homeless, skipping meals and missing sleep.'

Christine Harper-Fahey first met Vives in 1989 in Washington, D.C. when she was with the National Low Income Coalition. It called upon Vives to help organize the march to alert Congress to the plight of the nation's poor. It was one of many events that found Vives at the forefront.

"She was important as a voice," Harper-Fahey said, "truly committed to the needs of the homeless. She spread her message to all kinds of people."

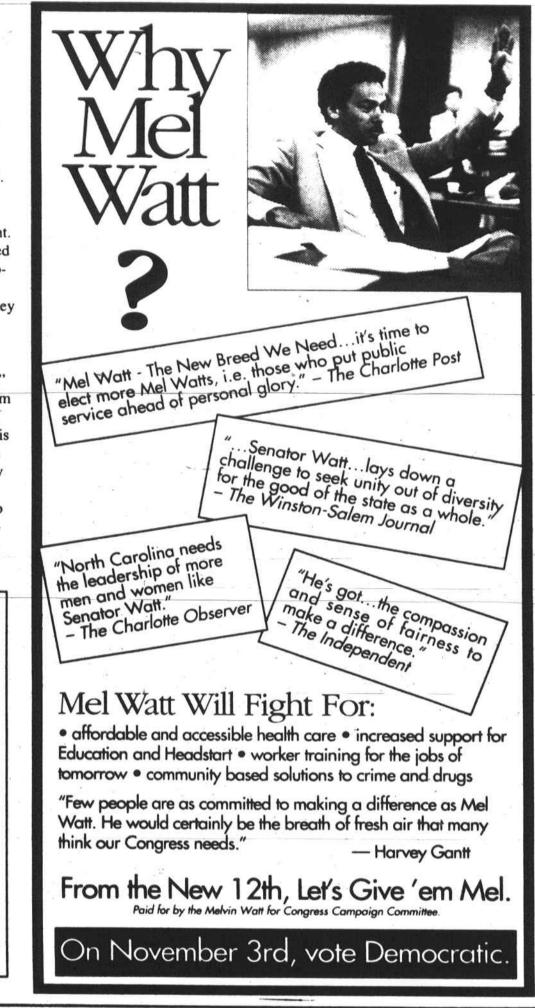
Some worry that Vives left mighty big shoes to fill. But Harper-Fahey has an optimistic view.

"I think there's going to be a hole (left by her absence), but I think she set the stage for those holes to be filled," she says. "It's a matter of people she inspired coming up to the table and carrying on her message." Vives' family expressed the same sentiment in the memorial program

distributed at her funeral.

"Kay cannot be replaced but it is our prayer that someone with Kay's open-hearted sharing and generosity will come forward to continue her strong voice for the homeless and to challenge the powerful and complacent to face the reality of homelessness."

"Our Dear Colleague and Friend, Kay Vives, died at 1:00 a..m, October 16, 1992, at her sister's home in Charlotte, North Carolina. As we all know, Kay lived to help others. She was a tireless warrior for the underdog. Kay was the moving force for the establishment of the homeless movement in Winston-Salem in recent years. This was just one of the many efforts she spearhearted over the years. Kay served as our receptionist for over 15 years. We will miss her. " The Staff of Legal Aid Thursday, October 29, 1992 Page A3 Winston-Salem Chronicle





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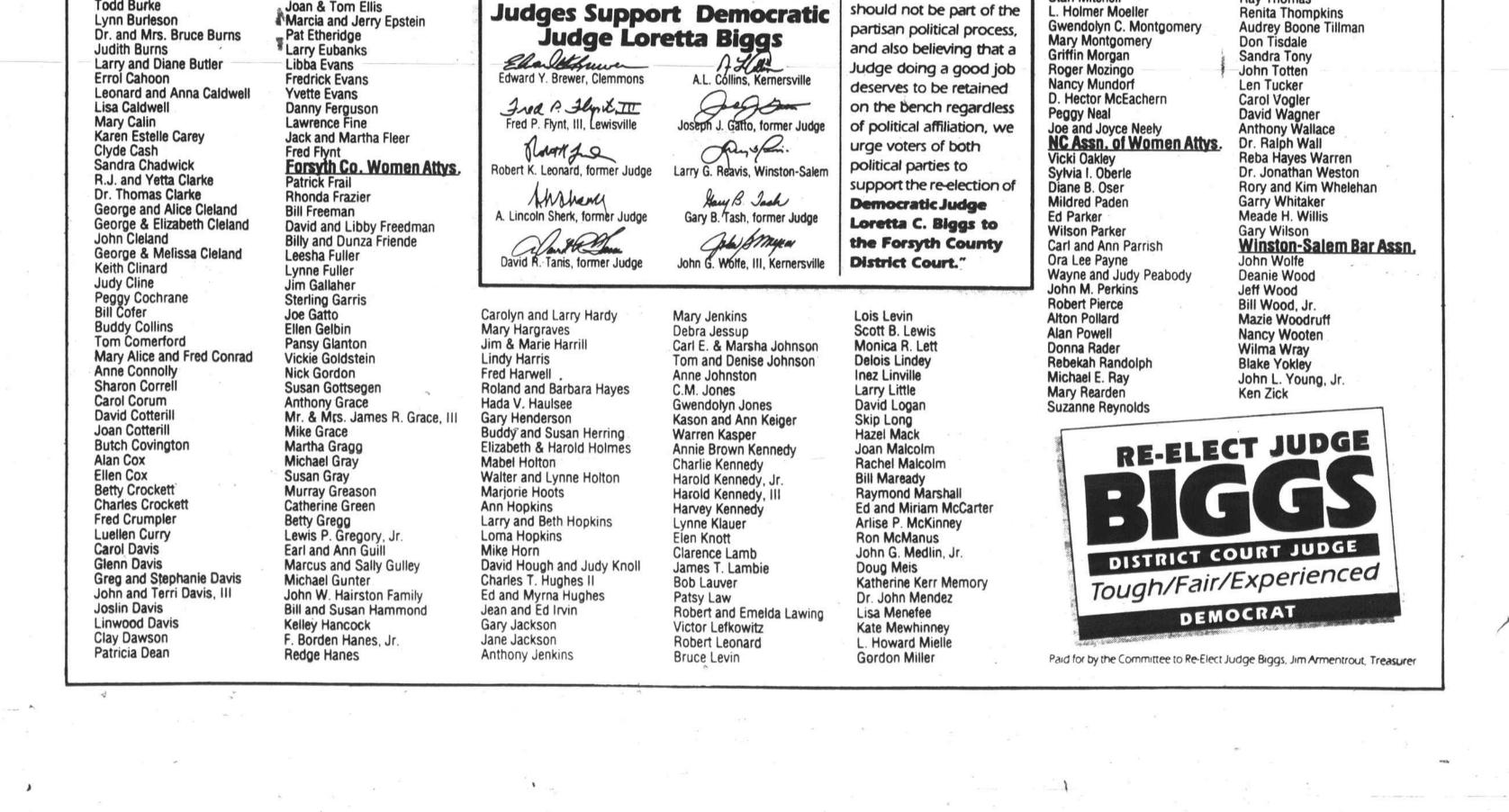
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