

# City's first black woman firefighter calls it a career

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faced on the job. Men firefighters, unaccustomed to having women in the ranks, ignored her and often left Lockhart to fend for herself. But she soldiered on.

"It was brutal," said Grady Lockhart, Linda's husband of 28 years. "She'd come home crying, but if it's worth having, it's worth the struggle."

Ultimately, Linda Lockhart pushed for equality on the job. CFD ultimately incorpo-

rated separate accommodations for women in addition to family leave.

"The other women accepted a lot of things, but they weren't ready for women with the policies," Lockhart said.

Lockhart found her stride and ultimately became a mentor to younger firefighters, especially women and people of color. Seven African American women firefighters have been hired by the department. Thirty-

six women are among CFD's 970 firefighters.

"Over the years, Linda took it upon herself to mentor other women to sustain them over a long period of time," Key said.

Said Lockhart: "Whenever they needed me, I was there for the cause."

The inherent danger of firefighting requires teamwork, which Lockhart said makes her time with CFD memorable. She's grateful to have worked with profes-

sionals who were dedicated to the job and each other.

"You always had somebody with you and we always had good equipment," she said. "It was never a one-person job, even though a lot of people don't realize it."

"She finally got people's

acceptance," Grady Lockhart said. "There was some resentment, some racism, but she sticks to challenges."

Lockhart, 49, has no plans to slow down. A pharmacy technician at Carolinas Medical Center, she's considering earning a pharmacy

degree. She's also mulling an offer to return to CFD as an administrator.

"We're not sure what direction she's going to take, but she has plenty of options," Grady Lockhart says. "It's not like she's going to be staying at home."

## Dems, blacks in tenuous position

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was getting to be too black. It meant that they had to be less aggressive in their support of civil rights issues, and they began systematically to do that."

So, despite President Clinton's reputation for an affinity toward black people, he was head of the Southern Governor's Association, which was opposed to affirmative action, says Walters.

"And that's where the leadership of the party came from for eight years. And so, the only reason they didn't do away with affirmative action was because of the protests on the part of blacks. Otherwise, they tried to tinker with that civil rights legacy every way that they knew how."

As Democratic presidential contenders fight to succeed George W. Bush, could the party return to politics as usual? Democratic party leaders bristle at the question.

"We've got to stop this stuff in the community saying the Democrats are taking everybody for granted," says Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean.

"There's been more done in six months [by Congress] for the African-American community than the Republicans did in six years. This is not a matter of giving up your values. If you do that, you can't win elections."

The record speaks for itself, says Dean.

"This is not a matter of who likes black people. This is a matter of this system and the Democratic Party has really worked incredibly well for African-Americans," Dean says. "The first thing we did after the Democrats took over was raise the minimum wage. That disproportionately affects African-Americans. Sixteen percent of all African-American workers were affected by that minimum wage increase."

All 43 black members of Congress are Democrats, he adds.

And with a record four black committee chairs, 16 subcommittee chairs, and black Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.), those Blacks finally have historic power, Dean points out.

"So, I completely disagree with the notion that this is about whether Democrats love black people or not. This is about Democrats creating a system where African-Americans could succeed."

That system is working says U. S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and reputed dean of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Ticking off a list of House successes,

including the Hate Crimes Act, the Emmett Till Act to solve unsolved civil rights crimes, the D. C. Voting Rights Act and the Anti-Voter Intimidation Act, Conyers says the drawback for even more aggressive legislation may be in the math.

With 233 Democrats and 202 Republicans in the House, there's only a margin of 31 votes, he says. Therefore, if 16 Democrats don't agree with the CBC and the leadership position and the Republicans stay organized, the Democrats lose.

Even the Democrats are divided, he points out.

There are 43 members of the CBC, but there are 48 Blue Dogs, or conservative Democrats. "Our majority is quite frankly a very thin one," Conyers resolves.

Conyers praises Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.). "She's been cooperating with me fully," he says. But, that cooperation with African-Americans has not transferred into the presidential race, civil rights leaders say.

"I am not supporting anybody," says the Rev. Al Sharpton during a recent airing of his nationally syndicated radio talk show. "Until I know, whoever I support, where they are on issues like the Supreme Court and they talk about specific cases, I am not - N-O-T," he spells the word for emphasis. "I am perfectly willing to be the one to force all of them to deal with these issues if I have to."

Democrats received 89 percent of the black vote in the 2004 presidential election and black voters are largely credited with the current Democratic majority in Congress.

Hilary Shelton, director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and Capitol Hill lobbyist says less than 1 percent of the NAACP's legislative agenda has come to a positive resolution and only about 10 percent has begun to move through the process.

Shelton stresses that this is only the first session of the 110th Congress and he fully expects more progress on issues such as the drop out rate, high stakes testing in "No Child Left Behind", school construction, help for Hurricane Katrina victims, mandatory minimum sentences and the death penalty, which the NAACP opposes.

The NAACP is a non-partisan organization, but Shelton says he has noticed a difference since the Democrats took over.

"We're seeing more movement on our bills, more substantive movement," he says. "There was very little movement on these issues."

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