

Delores Brown, 'grandmother' to community

OBITUARY |

BY SUSAN GILMORE
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Every morning Delores Brown would sit at the school bus stop in her Kent neighborhood to make sure the kids boarded safely.

Every afternoon she would meet the bus to help the children find their way home. Often she'd greet them with a piece of candy.

"She was known for giving wherever it was needed," said Mrs. Brown's daughter, Nancy Martell, from Texas. "She was a very kindhearted woman."

Mrs. Brown, 73, died Feb. 25 at Valley Medical Center of congestive heart failure.

She was a longtime resident of public housing and a community advocate who served as a commissioner of the King County Housing Authority.

"She seemed to be the grandmother of the community," said Rhonda Rosenberg, with the housing authority. "She helped guide the policies on the board because her interest and caring was so high."

Born in Detroit, she moved to Seattle with her husband, who was in the military, and raised six children in Tacoma.

Living on disability, she moved into the Valli Kee public-housing project in Kent, where she worked as an advocate for the tenants, particularly those in the Somali community.

"We will really miss Delores," said Safi Yusuf, a Somali who lives in Valli Kee. "She really helped the Somali people."

Mrs. Brown was appointed to the housing authority's board by County Executive Ron Sims in 2003.

"Two things stand out: the phenomenal role she played in her community and how she worked very closely with the refugee immigrant population, especially the Somalis," said Stephen Norman, executive director of the housing authority.

He said people couldn't figure out how she could accomplish so much with the language barrier, but she often communicated through the children, who picked up the English language easily.



Delores Brown was a commissioner on the county Housing Authority.

"She was the go-to person for a lot of the community in Valli Kee," said Norman, who said Mrs. Brown never missed a board meeting and even when she was dying in the hospital asked him to bring her briefing material. "She was a very special woman," he said.

Nancy Holland-Young, board chairwoman, said the two became close friends while serving on the board together. Mrs. Brown represented those who lived in housing-authority buildings. "She was the kindest person I ever met," said Holland-Young.

Viola Fick lived with Mrs. Brown at Valli Kee and remembered how she would always care for the 200 children who lived in the complex. "A lot of the Somalis didn't understand their papers and she would always do her best to help them fill them out," she said. "She loved giving candy to kids."

Fick said she'd often take Mrs. Brown out for drives and she loved to go into the mountains. "If she saw a deer she'd be thrilled to death," she said. "It was simple things like that. She'll be missed here."

One of Mrs. Brown's last accomplishments was to persuade the housing authority to build a new community center for the children living at Valli Kee. Groundbreaking is planned for this summer.

"The new community center will be a fitting legacy," said Norman.

In addition to Martell, Mrs. Brown is survived by daughters Sandi Hinkley, of Tennessee, Vickie Baines, of Tacoma, Helen Hinkley, of Tacoma, and sons Michael Hinkley, of Tacoma, and Joseph Hinkley, whose whereabouts are unknown.

Services are scheduled for 2 p.m. Saturday, March 6, at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 12817 S.E. 256th St. in Kent.

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