

Garden Pathways, Inc.

2007 "Woman with a Heart for Bakersfield"

Irma Carson



Irma Carson has an indomitable heart for the citizens of Bakersfield. A devoted administrator, volunteer and public servant, Irma has dedicated endless hours as an advocate for children and families. Irma's courage and her intrepid spirit have opened doors of opportunity for many.

As a pioneer for African-American women, Irma became the first black employee at Bakersfield City Hall in 1959. Then in 1968, Irma acquired the distinction as the first black female police officer for the City of Bakersfield, and eventually rose to become the first black female detective and later, the first female patrol sergeant.

In 1983, Irma was recruited to the board of Community Alcohol Counseling and Drug Center, known today as Ebony Counseling Center. After her retirement from BPD in 1989, Irma agreed to accept the position of Executive Director for three months. (She had enrolled in a local law program, intending to pursue a J.D.) However, with the vast unmet need in the African-American community for addiction treatment, Irma chose to continue as Executive Director. Within a year, she had substantially increased funding for the agency. As a result of her vision and leadership, Ebony expanded its services to meet the growing needs of the community — providing programs to address high infant mortality, educate the community about HIV/AIDS, prevent teen pregnancy, and respond to the complexities of substance abuse.

An avid believer that sound educational reform is achieved by working in concert with educators, parents, businesses, and the community, Irma began serving as an elected trustee on the Bakersfield City School District Board of Education in 1979, and being re-elected three times, continued in that position for fifteen years. In 1994, Irma was elected to the Bakersfield City Council to represent Ward 1 in southeast Bakersfield. Re-elected for three additional terms, Irma continues to diligently serve in that capacity today. Among Irma's unrelenting efforts to support her constituents, is her passionate quest to bring affordable housing to the southeast.

As a committed public servant and volunteer, Irma has continued to respond to the emerging needs and concerns of our community. Working to provide expanded services within the community, Irma has played an integral role in securing essential assistance that benefits many of the most "at need," including those impacted by gang violence. Irma has never lost sight of her vision and belief that education is the way to success and is the only realistic approach to improving the substance of life for all people. Irma's unwavering strength and determination to face the challenges in her life and her community have inspired a generation of women to stand in the midst of their challenges. Through the years, Irma has engaged in manifold civic activities and projects. She has garnered many awards of distinction and deeply appreciates the honors.

Irma moved to Bakersfield from St. Louis, Missouri in 1953 with her dad, mom, brothers, and sisters. Irma delights in her three daughters – Sharon, Karen, and Camille, and three grandchildren – Chris, Jason and Leslie. She is a proud new great grandmother to Jordan Simone.