



## Dr. Rubye J. Johnson

December 25, 1930 - January 30, 2025

Dr. Rubye J. Johnson, 94, activist, educator, businesswoman, and community matriarch departed this life on Thursday, January 30, 2025. She was born on December 25, 1930, in Lancaster, South Carolina to the late Mrs. Pearlle Johnson Reed and Mr. Willie Smith. Dr. Johnson was educated in the public schools of Lancaster County, South Carolina. She graduated as Valedictorian of her class in 1949 at Lancaster Training School (later named Barr Street High School). She earned the A. B. Degree (cum laude) in English with a minor in Social Studies, having graduated from Benedict College, Columbia, SC in 1953. She earned the Master of Arts Degree in Teaching English as A Secondary Language with an emphasis in Guidance from the Teacher's College, Columbia University, New York City, NY in 1964. Dr. Johnson, subsequently, had conferred upon her the honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree from Benedict College and the honorary Doctor of Laws Degree by Faith Grant College of Birmingham, Alabama. She received numerous awards and accolades during her career to include the Order of the Palmetto awarded by Governor Mark Sanford in 2005. Dr. Johnson was a faithful member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church from her early years of living until death. She grew up in the Saint Paul AME Church of Lancaster SC where her mother's home was just outside the back door of the church. Upon marrying the late Joseph B. Johnson, Sr., she relocated to Sumter, SC and joined First Baptist Church. Having kept ties to the AME Church, she would later return as a member of Mount Pisgah AME - 217 West Bartlette Street, Sumter, SC,

where she served faithfully until her passing. She served joyfully and dutifully as a Trustee, Steward, Class Leader, Pastor's Aid member, Social Action lead, Lay member and Choir member. One of her favorite hymns was "His Eye Is on the Sparrow". Dr. Johnson worked 33 years as Executive Director of the Wateree Community Actions, Inc. (WCAI), serving Lee, Clarendon, Kershaw, Richland and Sumter counties of South Carolina. After successfully developing, implementing and managing state and federally funded and regionally supported anti-poverty programs, projects and services, she retired in 2005. Among her greatest career accomplishments was the founding of the first Summer Head Start Program in Sumter County, South Carolina, in 1965 and the conversion of the early childhood education program for low- or moderate- income families into a year-round program for preschoolers in both Sumter city and county. Head Start services, under her leadership, grew to serve increasing numbers of children and families within the WCAI four-county service area. In 1988 the Governor asked her to provide emergency services to residents of Richland County. This expansion increased the agency's service area to five counties. Her other accomplishments included the ground-up construction of two additional Head Start facilities; one of which is named in her honor "The Rubye J. Johnson Head Start Center" in Sumter, SC. Dr. Johnson also designed and operated the first rural transit system in South Carolina, "Operation Bus Stop", which gave rise to the present-day Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority. Dr. Johnson co-founded and served as Administrator-Trustee of the South Carolina Employee Health and Welfare Insurance Company. She also co-founded the Sumter Phillip Rembert Tuskegee Airman, Inc. and served as its first Vice-President. Dr. Johnson was instrumental in the development and launching of several programs, initiatives, organizations and services that, today, continue to improve the quality of life for the citizenry of our community locally, statewide and nationally. Dr. Johnson, from 1953 to 1967, taught English in the public schools of Lancaster, Clarendon, and Sumter counties of South Carolina, and was, for a time, President of the South Carolina Classroom Teachers'

Association. She changed careers in 1967, to join the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act “War on Poverty” movement as the Assistant Director of the Sumter County Economic Opportunity Corporation, Inc., which was later renamed to Wateree Community Actions, Inc. Dr. Johnson’s memberships and affiliations included the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the NAACP, the Federation of Negro Women, the Benedict College Alumni Association, the Columbia University Teachers College Alumni Association, the South Carolina Community Actions Agency Program Directors’ Association, the South Carolina Association of Human Service Agencies, Inc., the South Carolina Association of Community Action Partnerships, Inc., the National Democratic Committee, and the South Carolina State Head Start Association. Dr. Johnson was initiated into the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated® Psi chapter in 1950 as an undergraduate at Benedict College. She has earned the distinction of being a “Diamond” member of the Sorority which signifies 75 years of membership this year (2025). She also served as a past president of the Sumter chapter Eta Zeta Omega. Dr. Johnson is preceded in death by her parents (Pearlie and Willie), two sisters Hattie McIlwain (Lancaster, SC) and Mary Johnson (Bronx, NY); two nephews William “Billy” McIlwain (Capitol Heights, MD) and Raymond McMurray (Old Saybrook, CT); her maternal grandmother Mary Duren (Lancaster, SC); her aunts Hattie Whitehead (Key West, FL) and Bessie Smith (Lancaster, SC); and of Washington DC, first cousin-in-law Maggie Lee Johnson, first cousin Teddie Lee Johnson, second cousin Patricia Russell, and third cousin Angela Russell; of Bronx, NY, niece Jacqueline Anita Johnson and great niece Wakiki Quintyne.

Dr. Johnson leaves to cherish two sons, Rev. Joseph B. Johnson Jr. (Columbia, SC) and Carnegie B. Johnson (Sumter, SC); three grandchildren of Columbia, SC—Joseph Benjamin Johnson, III, Joshua Isaiah Johnson, and Gabrielle Rubye Johnson; one great-granddaughter Milan Rose Gieger; her sister’s grandchildren of Bronx, NY—Theresa Quintyne and Irwin Quintyne; her

sister's great-grandchildren of Bronx, NY—Watalasia Quintyne and Aarion Quintyne; her nephew's widow Ophelia Truesdale McIlwain, her great nieces and nephews—Ingrid Crump (Troy), Cassandra McIlwain (Charlotte, NC), Attorney Raymond H. McIlwain (April); beloved cousins Gwendolyn Scott (Walter) and DeVona McFarlane (Juno) an host of other extended family in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins and loved ones.

In lieu of flowers or memorials in memory of Dr. Rubye J. Johnson donations may be made to the following, Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church PO Box 1118 Sumter, SC 29051, or Ruby J. Johnson Head Start Center 1155 N Lafayette Dr, Sumter, SC 29150.

# Cemetery Details

## Evergreen Memorial Park

802 N. Guignard Drive  
Sumter, SC

# Previous Events

## Visitation

FEB 7. 1:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Palmer Memorial Chapel  
304 South Main St.  
Sumter, SC 29150  
(803) 773-3381

## Alpha Kappa Alpha Ivy Beyond the Wall Ceremony

FEB 7. 6:00 PM (ET)

Palmer Memorial Chapel  
304 South Main St.  
Sumter, SC 29150  
(803) 773-3381

## A Celebration of Life

FEB 8. 11:00 AM (ET)

Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church  
217 West Bartlette St.  
Sumter, SC 29150

*The public may view from 10 am until the hour of service. The funeral service will be streamed on Saturday, February, 8 go to Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church Facebook page*

## Live Streaming

FEB 8. 11:00 AM.

Facebook

*The funeral service will be streamed on Saturday, February, 8 go to Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church Facebook page*

## Burial

FEB 8 (ET)

Evergreen Memorial Park  
802 N. Guignard Drive  
Sumter, SC

# Tribute Wall

CB

“ I'm sorry for your loss, Carney. My heart goes out to you and the Johnson family. His eye IS on the sparrow, and I know he's watching over you.



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**Cleveland Britton** - February 08, 2025 at 09:45 AM

TL

“ Dr. Johnson was my ninth grade teacher at Barr Street High School in Lancaster. She was an inspiration to all of her students. She was always supportive and urged her students to live up to their full potential. She was a teacher who was always immaculately dressed and was a symbol for the young ladies under her tutelage, showing them how a teacher should look and dress in the classroom. Later in life after she had left Lancaster and taken residency in Sumter, I was able to reconnect with her as I accepted a job in Sumter. Her community work and services were shown and appreciated greatly by the residents of Kershaw, Lee and Sumter Counties. It made me proud to see a fellow, Lancasterian with such humble beginnings migrate to another city, and do so well. Anyway, the world is a much better place for your having passed our way. Rest in Peace, Dr. Johnson you have earned your crown.

*Thomas Lathan '66 a Golden Tiger from Barr St. High*

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**Thomas Lathan** - February 07, 2025 at 09:32 PM

HG

“ *Huline & Lee Goodman*



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**Huline & Lee Goodman** - February 07, 2025 at 10:07 AM

HG

“ *Huline & Lee Goodman lit a candle in memory of Dr. Rubye J. Johnson*



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**Huline & Lee Goodman** - February 07, 2025 at 10:06 AM

KG

“ *My deepest condolences to the Johnson family. As the mother of your three adult grandchildren, I am eternally grateful for the unwavering love and support you provided to me and my children during our time together. Your love will forever be etched in my heart, and I am thankful for the profound impact you had on our lives. Job well done, soror! May you rest in peace. 🙏🕊️*

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**Karen Goins** - February 07, 2025 at 09:24 AM

MW

“ I was reared in the New Town Community of Lancaster, SC where Dr Rubye Johnson’s family lived 2 streets from my parents’ home. It was a time in which neighbors knew, loved and cared for each other , and in a sense, everyone felt like family.

*I can remember Dr Johnson as far back as 75 years ago when I was only 5 years old; she gave me my first Easter speech where we all attended St Paul AMEC. She was my high school mentor and teacher throughout high school, and she influenced me into becoming a classroom teacher.*

*My family and I have life time memories of Dr Johnson as a personal and confidential friend. She was like an Aunt to my husband and I , our daughters and grandsons. She had an “open invitation” in our home for all of our celebrations, dinners , reunions, and special occasions. We will definitely miss her presence at our next gathering.*

*“Lives of great men, all remind us...we can make our lives sublime...and departing leave behind us, Foot prints on the sands of time.”-Longfellow*

*Dr Rubye J. Johnson’s legacy has certainly left footprints on the sands of time.*

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**Mary McGriff Williams** - February 06, 2025 at 04:43 PM

WC

“ When I first graduated from college, I worked for Dr. Johnson at Wateree Community Actions. First in the LIHEAP program and then later full time in the JTPA program. I had great respect for Dr. Johnson. I remember coming into her office, a fearful young one, beginning in social services careers and she set me at ease. She was always cordial and had wisdom that only years of experience can give someone. To this day, as a college instructor, I tell my students about working there and with her and others. It's a way to honor her Wateree CA. I pray great grace, comfort and peace to all who mourn her loss.

Wendy Cunningham - February 06, 2025 at 10:55 AM

TF

“ Sending our deepest sympathy and condolences and prayers to the family and relatives and friends.



Tammy Harrison Edwards and Family - February 05, 2025 at 09:23 PM

LD

“ Dr. Johnson was my sister Becky's supervisor at Wateree. They had a spectacular relationship, traveled together quite a bit, and had a great deal of fun! Dr. Johnson spoke at Rebecca's homegoing in 2015. Wateree has been a great blessing to this community and those women were great at their jobs. They served the community with honor and grace. May they both enjoy Jesus in Heaven!

Louvenia Duncan - February 05, 2025 at 08:57 PM

AW

“ Our condolences to the family. May God continue to bless the family and heal the heavy hearts of losing a loved one. To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die, when someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure. Love leaves a memory no one can steal and those we love don't go away.



Ann & Vincent Webb - February 05, 2025 at 04:29 PM

MW

“ Dr. Johnson was a 'GIANT' in the Sumter and surrounding communities, she touched the lives of many. May her memory be a blessing to all that knew her. With deepest sympathy. Maggie J. Wilson and Family

maggie wilson - February 05, 2025 at 01:42 PM

EG

“ Evelyn Patterson Grant lit a candle in memory of Dr. Rubye J. Johnson



Evelyn Patterson Grant - February 05, 2025 at 10:37 AM

TF

“ Sending our deepest sympathy and condolences and prayers to the family and relatives and friends.



Tammy Harrison Edwards and Family - February 05, 2025 at 08:14 AM

LP

“ I enjoyed visiting with Soror Johnson in her beautiful home before moving to Columbia in 2023, We shared many career experiences. prior to retirement including challenges we both faced.....  
.She was certainly one to be respected!. My condolences to the family.

*Lois Parsons*

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**Lois Parsons** - February 04, 2025 at 06:14 PM