

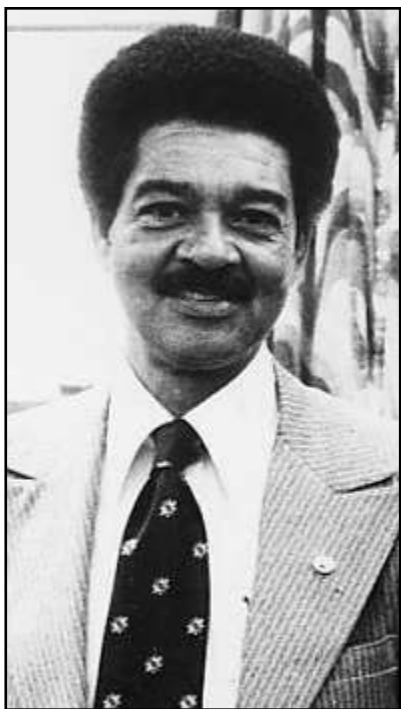
# NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE CONFERENCE 2003



**JOHN T. CLARK**  
First executive secretary of the Urban League of Pittsburgh

The Pittsburgh Urban League began walking, or crawling, before it actually came into existence.

Not mentioned much anymore as precursors of the Pittsburgh Urban League are organizations formed largely because of a study of the Hill District made by **Abraham Epstein**. Before he died in 1942, he had fought for Social Security and saw it come alive in 1937. In a like manner, he pursued social goals in Pittsburgh. After they read Epstein's study of city leaders, public and private, they asked



**ARTHUR J. EDMUNDS**  
Executive director of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1960-1985

## Vision

We envision a Greater Pittsburgh area where the significant disparities between African-Americans and whites in education, employment, health, housing and youth development have been eliminated. We believe the will and the resources are there to make Greater Pittsburgh a model safe community in which African-Americans, especially children can develop to their fullest potential.

The Urban League of Pittsburgh will provide progressive leadership and effective contemporary programming and services as it continues to serve as the premier advocate for African-Americans.

themselves "What shall we do?"

At the same time, there was another restless man in town. He was **Dr. Charles R. Zahniser**. He became one of a group of 20 ministers who fought to provide the city with honest government.

When Zahniser died on Christmas day in 1955, he was hailed in the newspapers as one of three Pittsburghers who organized the first Urban League in this city.

As the story goes, he, together with the late **Samuel Morsell**, former executive secretary of the Centre Avenue YMCA, and **Dr. Charles Cooper**, ex-director of Kingsley House, met on Oct. 26, 1914, and formed the Association for the Improvement of Social Conditions in the Hill District.

Then in 1918, this organization was merged with another group—the Pittsburgh Council for Social Service Among Negroes—and later became the Pittsburgh Branch of the National Urban League.

In late 1917, prior to its start in 1918, the active participants on the Pittsburgh end were **Dr. Francis Tyson** of the University of Pittsburgh, **Walter A. May**, president of the May Drug Co., and Morsell. On Sept. 20, 1917, Tyson wrote to **Eugene Kinckle Jones**, executive secretary of the National Urban League, concerning the need to employ an executive secretary for the development of a constructive program in Pittsburgh. Jones sent **John T. Clark**, a successful employee in the Housing and Industrial Department for the Urban League of New York, to act as executive secretary of the Pittsburgh Social Service Committee.

Clark was sent to conduct a survey of the needs in Pittsburgh and to determine whether the city could benefit from an Urban League affiliate. His conclusions were, of course, that Pittsburgh needed an Urban League, and he returned as the affiliate's first executive secretary. On Feb. 12, 1918 May signed the lease for 508 Wylie Ave., the Urban League's new home.

### 1918

The Urban League of Pittsburgh opens its doors at 505 Wylie Ave. in the lower Hill District. The League's first executive director, **John T. Clark**, a Black sociologist, and first president, **Walter May**, the white owner of May Drug Co., formed an interracial alliance that would become the benchmark as to how the organization conducted business.

### 1920s

- Sponsors conference on Negro Industrial Welfare Workers, which issued a call for hiring Blacks in personnel positions and as nurses.

- Launches campaign that leads to the hiring of **Jeanette Washington** as first Black nurse for the city.

- National Urban League Conference held in Pittsburgh.

- Executive Director **Alonzo Thayer** involves the League with the Welfare Fund, which would later become The United Way, a longtime supporter and contributor to League programs.

- League hires **Harold Lett** as first industrial secretary or job developer, and he forms alliances with Westinghouse Electric, Pittsburgh Coal and Carnegie Steel companies to hire Black laborers.

### 1930s

- First Black teacher hired by the Pittsburgh Board of Education, the result of negotiations begun by former executive director, John T. Clark.

- The James Weldon Johnson Summer Camp opens. The fresh air retreat, designed to offer a respite from urban life, is the first such camp in Pittsburgh for Blacks.

- Builds coalitions with government agencies such as the



**THOMAS BARTON**  
President of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1942-1953



**WALTER MAY**  
President of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1918-1920

## Pittsburgh Urban League celebrates

# 85

## Years of Progress

Works Progress Administration and other federal projects, and begins to fight discrimination in unions and businesses.

### 1940s

- Files complaints against Yellow Cab Co. about lack of service to Hill District. Dispute still exists.

- Bell Telephone is targeted in a campaign to hire Black operators.

- Under **K. Leroy Irvis**, pick-



**DAVID E. EPPERON**  
Board chair of Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1981-1990

ets Downtown department stores to protest unfair employment practices.

- In conjunction with the NAACP and other community groups, the League sues to desegregate the Highland Park swimming pool.

### 1950s

- Advocates that the Housing Authority of Pittsburgh stop its racial segregation in public housing.

- Dialogue begins with the Board of Education for desegregation and affirmative action hiring in public schools. Results of the negotiations won't be seen until 25 years later.

### 1960s

- New outreach effort leads to branch offices. The League also launches neighborhood youth counseling, job training and summer work programs.

- Renews commitment to Pilot Placement, a program to get Blacks into previously restricted positions. The Golden Triangle is targeted, along with increasing the number of promotions for secretaries.

- The Urban League of Pittsburgh founds NEED (Negro Emergency Education Drive), which provides grants and scholarships to help Black students attend college.

- League hires first full-time health officer to organize support and treatment programs for sickle cell anemia and founds the Sickle Cell Society.

### 1970s

- Thanks in part to increased federal funding, the staff grows from 60 to 200.

- Completes construction on Homewood North Housing development.

- Forms a partnership with Community Employment Training Programs (CETA) to provide jobs for county youths.

- Forms the local Reading is FUNDamental Program.
- The ULP releases "Blacks in White," a hospital employment study and the access of stock in Warner Cable as part of franchise negotiations.

### 1980s

- Initiates SWAT School to Work Action Team, to help find employment for area teens.

- Begins to address AIDS education in the Black community.
- Part of coalition that pushes for minority contractors to get at least 15 percent of work at the new Pittsburgh International Airport.

- Launches the Mon Valley TNT program for unemployment; begins the Self-Employment Program; and receives the Heinz Award for the Business and Finance Academy at Westinghouse High School, that was originally established with a Clark Award.

### 1990s

- Gets a \$450,000 federal grant to help battle drug abuse in the Mon Valley.

- Holds a Summit on Violence at the Hill House to address the rising rate of Black-on-Black crime.

- Launches Jobs Fair with NAACP to recruit more minority workers for hotel industry.

- Initiates the youth anti-violence campaign: "It Takes a Whole Community to Raise a Child."

- Initiates the Ronald H. Brown Leadership Banquet as its major fund-raising activity.

- Begins its Youth Development Department with two significant programs: the Pittsburgh Youth Collaborative and the Pittsburgh Chapter of the NULITES program (national Urban League Incentives to Excel and Succeed).

- Establishes the first charter school in Pittsburgh.

- The "Urban Reality" radio talk show is inaugurated as a biweekly African-American forum on WAMO.

- The first African American Leadership Directory, highlighting the professional achievements of African-Americans is published.

### 2000s

- The Hospitality and Leisure Training Program becomes a stand-alone training program.



**ALEXANDER ALLEN**  
Executive director of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1950-1959

- The 21st Century Achievers program is launched in Duquesne through a National Urban League grant.

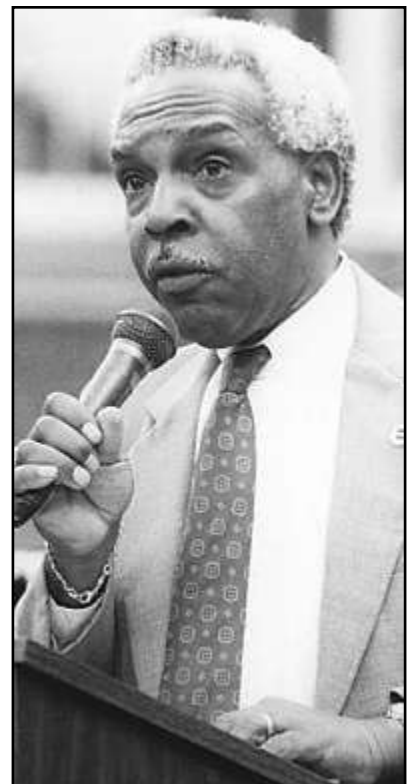
- The Department of Research and Public Policy is established.

- Wins the Whitney M. Young Jr. Award from the National Urban League for its racial justice initiatives.

- The African American Leadership Development Program is established to include African-American professionals on policy-making boards.

- The Pittsburgh Chapter of the Urban League Young Professionals is established.

- Oversees publication of the Black Papers on Health, documenting health disparities between Blacks and whites, and African American Health Promotion Month is re-instituted by the Urban League of Pittsburgh and the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Minority Health.



**LEON L. HALEY**  
President and CEO of the Urban League of Pittsburgh, 1985-1994

## Mission

The mission of the Urban League of Pittsburgh is to assist African-Americans in the achievement of social and economic equality. Toward this end, we are collectively committed to excellence and superior quality in the services we provide and the activities in which we are engaged. We implement this mission through:

- Program services that provide opportunities for African-Americans to better their condition through employment, training and economic empowerment, education, early childhood services, housing and youth development programs;

- Advocacy that addresses the broad range of issues and public policies that affect African-Americans;

- Bridge-building between races to forge significant partnerships needed to address community issues; and

- Research that informs and educates the region about the state of African-Americans.



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