



Warren Widener Class of 2014

Warren Widener grew up on Southside in Oroville and graduated from Oroville High School (OHS) in 1956. He was a life member of the California Scholastic Federation (CSF), won a Bank of America Award for Liberal Arts and Social Science, and was the first African-American student at OHS to enroll in college prep courses. He was selected as the main speaker at his OHS commencement exercise. Upon graduation, Warren was awarded an academic scholarship to the University of California at Berkeley (Cal).

Warren was active in sports at OHS, running track all 4 years, playing football 3 years, boxing for a year and a member of Block O all 4 years. He was very active in ASB activities, serving as president of his freshman class, Spanish Club, and CSF. He was a two-time California State Orator Champion and won several Lions Club Speech Contests in the area along with being a member of the OHS Brain Brawl Team.

Following high school graduation, Warren earned his BA degree at Cal, along with being selected as the Distinguished Military Graduate there. Warren then served in the military with the United States Air Force (USAF) Strategic Air Command during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He trained and evaluated missile crews and was an integral part of national readiness throughout the crisis. He attained the rank of First Lieutenant and received his honorable discharge.

He then returned to school and attended the Boalt Hall School of Law at Cal where he earned his Juris Doctorate degree.

Warren had a long and successful career in law, politics, and public service. It was his work with the United Methodist Church Youth Fellowship that led to his life in politics in the East Bay. Warren was elected to the Berkeley City Council in 1969 at the age of 31 and became a fixture in the fiery political scene in the 1970's. Two years later he was elected as the youngest mayor ever in Berkeley, CA as well as that city's first ever African-American mayor. He served 2 terms as mayor, 1971-79 during a period in which Berkeley's always tumultuous political landscape shifted steadily to the left. By Berkeley's standards, Warren was a moderate. He was defeated in his bid for reelection in 1979. Warren was always a champion of children and families, particularly those in the traditionally working-class South and West Berkeley neighborhoods.

Following his years in City politics, Warren served 4 years on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors. During this time he worked with OUHSD Hall of Fame member, Admiral Robert Toney, to develop a program to build military housing on vacant land owned by the government. This program produced more than 3,500 housing units throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and became a model for the nation.

As mayor of Berkeley, Warren was on the national lecture circuit. He also led a United States Delegation to Hungary for the State Department. The purpose of the visit was to normalize relationships with Hungary following return to Hungary of the St. Stephen's Crown by the United States under the Carter Administration.

Warren worked tirelessly to improve his community, especially to improve the lives of the homeless following the Loma Prieta earthquake. He was instrumental in removing the train tracks along Sacramento Street which long had been a sort of demarcation between white and African-American neighborhoods. He was past president of the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and a Board member at the College Preparatory School in Oakland, CA where all 3 of his sons earned their high school diplomas. For many years Warren and his wife opened their home to Foreign Exchange students as well as homeless people and troubled youth.

He is survived by his three sons from his 44 year marriage to Mary Lee Widener - Warren Jr., Michael, and Stephen. He also left two brothers, Arnold and Michael, a sister Lorraine, a granddaughter and a great grandson. Cousins Zoretta and Tulani cared for him in his final years. Warren passed away in Hayward, CA and military services were held on October 3, 2013 in Oakland, CA at the church he attended throughout his adult life.