

THE COATS SENIOR CENTER, INC.

# Brief History of Coats Senior Center, Inc.

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## “Where Memories Have Meaning”

By Rebecca McLean

6/5/2009

This document reflects a brief history of the Coats Senior Center, Inc. from 1986-present. Most of the information is taken from the writings of Ruth Parrish, M.T. Strickland, and newspaper accounts.

## **History of the Coats Senior Center**

This brief history that I am writing is in no wise complete, but I hope to convey to the reader that what is now the Coats Senior Center, Inc., was born out of a passion and fortitude that is rarely seen today.

### **The writings of M.T. Strickland seem to echo this sentiment:**

*A Dream! Yes, at one time it was a dream, but now under the leadership of Marvin Johnson and other progressive civic-minded people of the Coats Community, it has become a reality.....Just recently they raffled off a quilt donated by a member and raised one thousand dollars. This is just a start.*

*....Heading up this project is Marvin Johnson and Carsie Denning. Mr. Johnson....working with state gov't and local officials....Mr. Denning heading up the work force at Coats.....*

*At present we have a fifty-two thousand {dollar} grant...forty-one thousand of in-kind monies.... We as a group will have to raise fifty thousand dollars to complete this project.... We will raise this money.....But a large portion of these monies will have come from you and others like you to finish making this dream a reality....*

*Let's give them a place to watch TV, have craft shows, play checkers, practice their band, cook and deliver meals to the needy and shut-ins, play bingo, and do the things that we will want to do when we are their age. We are on our way as Mr. Price, owner of the SLC Fashion Corporation here in Coats, has donated 1.39 acres of land to be used for this very important project.*

*Other people....giving their valuable time....Plans Committee-Nelson Currin, Carsie Denning, and Johnny {Johnnie} Barnes...Construction Committee-Nelson Currin, Albert Gregory, and Billy Pope...Equipment and Furnishings-Mrs. Betty Gregory, Mrs. Mary Langdon, and Ms. Lib Johnson... Voluntary Work Committee-Mr. Johnnie Barnes...Finance Committee-Norfleet Gardner, Tim Brown, and Phil Bradley...Treasurer-Max Beasley...Name and Firm Committee-Gene Stewart....Contract Committee-M.T. Strickland, Randy Rambeau, Larry Kittrel, Ann Thornton, Earl Jones, Francis Avery, and Dottie Tyndall....Events Committee-Virginia Pollard....*

***We thank you for taking your valuable time to read this and we are hoping that you too, will want to help us on this project, be a part of it and when you close your eyes at night and think "I hope one day that people will want to do this for me." It {is} something to think about!!.....***

*Sincerely Yours, M.T. Strickland*

*Excerpts taken from a primary document written by M.T. Strickland found in a book from a compilation by Ruth S. Parrish, Secretary/Director {1986-87?}*

**From the *Coats Social Notes* by Wanda Pollard (The Daily Record, Thursday, November 6, 1986):**

*A near-capacity crowd filled Coats School Auditorium on November 1<sup>st</sup>, for the Variety Show, with proceeds going toward the new Senior Citizen's Center....The Swinging Elders opened the show, singing and playing their own assortment of instruments....Mr. Marvin Johnson is to be commended for his interest and his efforts in starting the Center for the Senior Citizens. This is a very worthwhile cause that Coats can be proud of.*

What is now the Coats Senior Center, Inc. (CSC) was born from the ideas, determination, and hard work of local citizens in the Coats Community. Meeting in churches, homes, and local places of business; plans were being made and implemented under the leadership of L. Marvin Johnson. Mr. Johnson was organizer of the planning committees for the center and served as the first president. The present day CSC also took root as early as 1971, with the formation of the Coats' Happy Senior Citizens Club. This club was organized by Mrs. Belle Williams, Mrs. Hilda Pope, and Mrs. Betty Gregory. After a few meetings together it was decided to form a band using whatever was at hand to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. They also played ragtime and jazz for civic organizations. This particular group of local senior citizens became known as the "Swinging Elders". The Swinging Elders helped pave the way for an alternative senior congregate establishment in the town of Coats. M.T. Strickland, early member of the founding committee of the Coats Senior Center, wrote this about the Swinging Elders: *These senior citizens are real active and have a 50 plus band that travels throughout the state playing their music at rest homes, churches, etc. At this time the band is using a room at the Coats Baptist Church. This building will be a big plus and make them even better as they go about trying to make people smile and forget their troubles.*

**Timeline of the Coats Senior Center, Inc.**

**1971**-The Coats' Happy Senior Citizens Club unofficially formed by Mrs. Hilda Pope, Mrs. Virginia Pollard, Mrs. Belle Williams, Mrs. Betty Gregory and others

**1972**-Formation of the Swinging Elders-Mrs. Belle Williams, Director

**1986**-Project committees organized for what is now the Coats Senior Center. Others added after M.T. Strickland's account above- (Event and Fund Earning)-Belle Williams, Hilda Pope, and Hazel Barnes

**First CEO's of the Board**

President-Marvin Johnson...

Vice President-Albert Gregory

**General Board of Directors:**

Chairman-Carsie Denning

Secretary-Ruth Parrish

Treasurer-Max Beasley

Johnnie Barnes, Albert Gregory, M.T. Strickland, Nelson Currin, Tim Brown, Virginia Pollard, M.O. Phillips, Billy Pope

**Advisory Board of Directors:**

Norfleet Gardner, Robert Pleasant, Phil Bradley, Betty Gregory, Hilda Pope, M.O. Phillips, Belle Williams

**March 1986**-Board of Directors stay focused on the following: organizing project committees, gaining endorsements, and seeking help and blessing of the town council

**April 1986**-Seniors under the leadership of Marvin Johnson appeared before the town council to present a documentation, and petition....asking them to give their endorsement for the “go ahead”...Mr. Johnson pointed that the Feds would grant 85% of funds needed, the State 5% and well, the other 10%...That’s right...the people. (Note: The cost of the project would exceed \$200,000).

**May 1986**-Marvin Johnson announces to the Coats Commerce that a plot of land would be donated by the owner of Terry Hill, Mr. Price.

**May 20, 1986**-At the home of Marvin Johnson, a name was decided for the dream: *The Coats Senior Center*

**May 27, 1986**-Carsie Denning, architect, agreed to draw a blue print for the building plan along with Johnnie Barnes.

**June 1986**-At the meeting of the Board at First Citizens Bank in Coats, NC: 1) Upon considering the advice of attorney Joe Tart, the Board votes to become a nonprofit organization, 2) The Board and Mr. Johnson are cautioned about the stipulation that if the Center folds in less than 20 years, the original property/deed reverts to Mr. Price. Also, Ms. Margaret Hardee, head of the Region M Area Agency on Aging cautions that Federal monies received would go back to Region M.

**June 13, 1986**-The Coats Senior Center is officially incorporated, thereafter known as the Coats Senior Center, Inc.

**July 1986**-Official Board of Directors is confirmed for the new Coats Senior Center. Betty Weaver is added as a member.

**September 1986**-Max Beasley presents his designed logo for the Coats Senior Center and it was adopted: “Where Memories Have Meaning”

**September 22, 1986**-Groundbreaking! (See attached article).

**October 15, 1986**-Attorney Joe Tart presented Board with the By-Laws. The entire body of 26 members agreed to the adoption of the By Laws by giving signatures.

**July 7, 1987**-The Coats Senior Center, Inc. receives \$14,000 from the state of NC endorsed by Governor James G. Martin

**September 12, 1987**-First Annual Coats Senior Citizens Day held. Board of Directors resolved that RUTH PARRISH be honored on behalf of all citizens of the Coats Community....thanking her for her outstanding performance in all aspects of preparation and operation of the First Annual Coats Senior Citizens Day.

**December 7, 1987**-The Coats Senior Center opens its doors.

**May 9, 1988**-Dedication Ceremony with Governor James G. Martin

**September 1988**-The Board of Directors of the Coats Senior Citizens Center authorizes the establishment of the name of the large room on the north end of the building as the "THE JOHNNIE R. BARNES HALL" and that a picture of Johnnie R. Barnes be placed in a conspicuous location in that room so that all may hereafter be reminded of his contributions.

**January 1988**- The Board of Directors of the Coats Senior Citizens Center authorizes the establishment of the name of the large room adjacent to the kitchen as "THE L. MARVIN JOHNSON HALL" and that a picture of L. Marvin Johnson be placed in a conspicuous location in that room so that all may hereafter be reminded of his contributions.

**June 2008**-The Coats Senior Center, Inc. accomplishes a great milestone as having been a senior center for 20 years. No original grant monies will have to be paid back to the grantee and the land is the property of the corporation.

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### **Coats Senior Center Today**

Since its founding in 1986, the Coats Senior Center, Inc. has had many folks coming in and out of its halls and corridor, laughing; learning; volunteering; participating in programs that promote independent, healthy lifestyles; fundraising; games; travel; and more. However, the Coats Senior Center is steadily facing challenges to retain services for seniors in the community. Since 2001 a steady decline in membership and income has and will continue to be an obstacle in keeping the mission on course. Just this year, the Federal Government cut grants that directly affects local senior centers by nearly 50% and more is expected to follow. The corporation will have to work hard to keep the doors open and find innovative ways to bring in funds and effectively deal with these new challenges. As M.T. Strickland wrote in 1986: *We thank you for taking your valuable time to read this and we are hoping that you too, will want to help us on this project, be a part of it and when you close your eyes at night and think "I hope one day that people will want to do this for me." It {is} something to think about!!.....*

**Past Executive Directors** (some years may be off a year or two)

1986-1987—Ruth Parrish and Belle Williams

1987-1996—Peggy Brown

1996-2000—Johnna Haskins

2000-2002—Wanda West

Interim until August 2002—Christine Parrish

2002-2006—Reisha Lasater

2006-2007—Erica Gallion

2007-present—Rebecca McLean

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**Money Borrowed to Build Coats Senior Center, Inc.**

1<sup>st</sup>-\$50,497 New Construction in 1987

2<sup>nd</sup>-\$25,000 New Construction in 1988

3<sup>rd</sup>-\$12,000 (Year unknown)