**James Elliott Lawson**

**(1923-1982)**

James Elliott Lawson was born on March 31, 1923 to Albert and Ruth Elliott Lawson in a home at the corner of Dayton and High Streets in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He attended the Dayton Street Elementary School (Union School) and graduated from Bryan High School in 1942. His first job at age 14 was stock boy at P.W. Weiss grocery store. He worked up to deliveryman and later became delivery driver.

Following graduation from high school, James worked a few months before being drafted into World War II. He served three years, primarily in the North Africa theater before being honorably discharged. Returning to Yellow Springs he became an apprentice with Venerable Hunter, a mason contractor, building homes for African American veterans in Yellow Springs for which there was a great need, not just in Yellow Springs but in the entire Miami Valley area. With this skill James joined the management team of Porter and Hooper construction company in yellow Springs, first building a home for his family.

For three decades following the war, James was a distinguished leader in the Yellow Springs community, both as a private citizen and as a public official working to overcome racial discrimination and to improve the quality of local government.

He was elected to serve on the Yellow Springs Village Council in 1957 and served in that capacity until 1964, after which he served as Mayor of Yellow Springs until 1975.

James was active in the founding of the Negro Veterans Association and of the Miami Township Civic Association. He also worked with the Yellow Springs Committee for Racial Equality in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960s James was the author of the Village of Yellow Springs Fair Practice Ordinance which created the Village Human Relations Commission, and as a member of Village Council successfully effected its adoption as a law. The ordinance was one of the first of its kind in the United States and attracted many municipalities large and small, including Chicago, that considered adoption of a similar law.

In 1964 James was a leader in the planning and staging of the Community March of Reconciliation following a civil rights demonstration in Yellow Springs protesting the refusal of a local barber to serve black customers. The march along with the work of the Human Relations Commission was credited with restoring racial harmony to Yellow Springs following the conflict, which included police confrontation with civil rights demonstrators. The protest prompted the resignation of then mayor, Leo Hughes, who was the brother-in-law of Lewis Gegner, the barber. The resignation of Hughes paved the way for Councilman Lawson to become mayor of Yellow Springs until his retirement in 1975.

Following his retirement, James and his family moved to Eugene, Oregon where he accepted a position with Lane Community College as Cooperative Work Experience (CWE) coordinator. In this position he served as a vital link between Lane Community College and Lane County.

James died at age 59 in December 1982 of a heart attack in his home in Eugene. Survivors include his wife Eugenia Hughes Lawson, his son Philip, daughter Tanya Lawson, brother Nathaniel Lawson, and sister Phyllis Jackson.

The Northwest Career Educators and Employees Association established a James E. Lawson Outstanding Service Award in 1983 in honor of James. The award reads “The Northwest Placement Association was fortunate to have the benefit of his brilliant mind, boundless energy, innovative creativity and endless giving of himself to others.”