

In Memoriam



Bob Buckhorn, Mayor

WHEREAS, the City of Tampa takes pride in recognizing those individuals whose dedication have made a lasting impact on our community and its citizens. One of these individuals was **The Honorable Helen Gordon Davis**, a well-known, beloved and respected public servant, trailblazer and civil rights activist who passed away on Monday, May 18, 2015, at age 88; and

WHEREAS, born on December 25, 1926 in Brooklyn, New York, Mrs. Davis became a fashion model as a teenager, received a degree in Theater from Brooklyn College, and thereafter appeared in George Bernard Shaw radio plays in New York. In 1948, she moved to Tampa, Florida with her husband Gene where she taught high school drama and earned a Master's Degree in Theater from the University of South Florida, and her love of theater and talents led her to stage performances in regional community theaters, and she received several Gaspar Awards including Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress, and she authored a paper, *Why the Theatre of the Absurd is the World's Greatest Satire*; and

WHEREAS, Mrs. Davis was an unparalleled champion in support and advocacy of the rights of women, minorities and the disadvantaged, steadfast in her principles of fairness, and she was the first Caucasian woman in Florida to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and in support of its efforts to desegregate establishments, she participated in the lunch counter sit-in at the Woolworth's Department Store in downtown Tampa in 1960. One of her proudest accomplishments was founding The Centre for Women, renamed *The Helen Gordon Davis Centre for Women*, and for almost four decades it has impacted the lives of many women, children and the elderly who are in crises and face uncertain futures by providing the tools to help them reach independent and successful lives; and

WHEREAS, to be the voice for the disadvantaged and to legislate on behalf of minorities, women, and families, Mrs. Davis ran successfully for the Florida House of Representatives in 1974, becoming the first woman from Hillsborough County to serve, where she remained until 1988, when she was elected to the Florida Senate. Mrs. Davis was a courageous and powerful legislator, fighting for equity and equality, and to be heard in a male-dominated political arena, and she accomplished great things including improvements to pay equity, day-care, public schools, consumer protection, and public bathrooms for women, she sponsored the Displaced Homemakers Bill, established the Displaced Homemakers Trust Fund, and her efforts provided citizens with a greatly improved quality of life, and her effectiveness and composure earned the respect of her colleagues and led the way for future women leaders in public service; and

WHEREAS, dedicated to the community she loved, Mrs. Davis was a member of the Athena Society, League of Women Voters, Congregation Schaarai Zedek, and was a major supporter of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, and her contributions earned her many honors including being the first recipient of the *Lifetime Achievement Award* from the League of Women Voters, inducted into the *Hillsborough County Women's Hall of Fame* by the Commission on the Status of Women, and a Florida House and Florida Senate Resolution designated it *Senator Helen Gordon Davis Appreciation Day* on April 10, 2008 and it was proclaimed *Helen Gordon Davis Day* on October 16, 2008 in Tampa by Mayor Pam Iorio; and

WHEREAS, known as a true public servant, mentor, and inspiration to all who knew her, she will be forever remembered for her love of family, friends and people from all walks of life, high ethical standards, passion, intelligence, fearlessness and grace, and although we are grieved at the loss of this extraordinary citizen, her legacy will continue to live on through the improvements she brought to our community and in all those whose lives she has touched and encouraged.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Bob Buckhorn, by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Tampa, Florida, do hereby urge all citizens to join me in publicly expressing sorrow and heartfelt appreciation to the Helen Gordon Davis Family, her son Gordon, daughters Stephanie and Karen, Grandchildren, sister Jeanne, and other family members, and to express our hopes that they will take solace in their many cherished memories and the impact of her life on our city, state and nation.

Dated in Tampa, Florida, this 20th day of May, 2015.



Bob Buckhorn

Mayor