

Photo Display Honors Late Betty Barker Watkins

DAVE NICHOLSON, The Tampa Tribune

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PLANT CITY - Plant City Photo Archives has put together an exhibit in memory of Betty Barker Watkins, a longtime community leader who died recently.

The display, "In Memory of Betty Barker Watkins, 1928 – 2007," has dozens of photos, including one of her playing the piano with one shoe off in 1958.

The exhibit includes nine of her ubiquitous hats. The one-time missionary and retired educator was known for her hats and was a special guest at the Plant City Photo Archives "Progressive Tea and Tour of Historic Homes" in January because the finale was a hat contest.

Watkins, who was 78 when she died July 10, served on the advisory council of the Photo Archives and was instrumental in collecting hundreds of photographs of Plant City area veterans, and the stories about those photos. In April, she and another longtime leader, retired car dealer B.M. "Mac" Smith, were presented with the Heritage Award by the non-profit archives organization.

Watkins was elected to the city commission in the late 1960s and was reportedly the first female elected to municipal office in Hillsborough County. She retired from the school system after a 37-year career and was widely known for her generosity and her musical ability, including playing the piano with one shoe off, using her big toe to press the pedals.

Officials at the archives, 119 N. Collins St., expect to show the exhibit through August. Reprints of any photograph are available at a nominal cost. For information, call the archives at (813) 754-1578.