

BARBARA COX EASLEY – SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE – IS HONORED

By Dr. Yvonne King

On April 22, 2004, Barbara Cox Easley joined Robert Bogle, Kenny Gamble, Louis Massiah, and Christine Washington in being honored by the Advocate Community Development Corporation (ACDC) for her contribution to “urban excellence in Philadelphia.” ACDC is one of the oldest Community Development Corporations in the country, and in its 36-year tenure has rehabilitated or constructed almost 400 housing units in North Philadelphia. Barbara Easley’s house is one of those that was renovated by ACDC, which she bought in March of 1985. She resides there today and continues to contribute to that neighborhood. After being elected to ACDC’s Board of Directors in the mid-1980s and serving on the Board for more than 10 years, Barbara was elected as Chairperson of the Board in 1998.

Barbara’s community service in Philadelphia is well known, particularly by her clients and their families whom she served during her 27-year career as a social worker for Pennsylvania’s Department of Public Welfare in the Ridge District. Always motivated by people’s suffering and social injustice, Barbara initiated and joined organizations that addressed these issues, including co-founding “Sisters Remember Malcolm” to preserve the legacy of human rights champion, Malcolm X.

But, while listening to Sharif T. Street present the award to Barbara last month during ACDC’s fourth annual “Breakfast of Champions,” I recalled the day in August 1995, when Heshimu Jaramogi took me to the 18th block of Diamond Street to meet this sister, who, like me, had been a member of the Black Panther Party. We found BC, as I would come to know her, sitting on her front steps enjoying the summer sun. Although we spoke briefly, I felt her warm and contagious spirit. Years later I learned about the

tremendous impact her decision in 1967 to join the Black Panther Party, while a student at San Francisco Community College in California, would have on her life.

Because of her diverse skills, resourcefulness, and commitment to serve the people “body and soul,” Barbara not only worked in Oakland, at the BPP headquarters, but also in New York, Philadelphia, and overseas. In June 1970, she was assigned to the International Section, where she worked in North Africa and Europe. Her work with African-American GIs in Germany during the Vietnam War was particularly challenging. But on this side of the Atlantic, Barbara raised money for the Panthers’ survival programs, served in the Free Breakfast for Children Program, and solicited donations for the Free Clothing Program. But, according to Barbara, when she worked in New York, “My favorite thing was selling [the Panther] newspapers; going out on the street and meeting people.”

Barbara’s work with the Advocate Community Development Corporation is an example of her ongoing efforts to implement the Black Panther Party’s Ten-Point Platform and Program, which states in Point no. 4: “We want decent housing fit for the shelter of human beings.” Although it is clear that recognition does not motivate this Servant of the People, we are pleased that ACDC has honored Barbara Cox Easley for her noteworthy accomplishments in community service. Fortunately, BC’s commitment to help people, particularly the youth, is a life-long one. As shared in Mumia Abu-Jamal’s latest book, We Want Freedom: a life in the Black Panther Party (2004), Barbara makes this clear: “If I can help one young person to forge forward, keep the faith, give strength to or clear up his/her direction, I live to do the job.”