

**MR.** Phillip Oswell Berry was born on August 26, 1940 in Paw Creek, NC

which is just west, down Freedom Drive from the Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology. He lived his life like he was in a hurry, as if he knew his time on earth would be short.

Mr. Berry was one of 7 children born to parents who died when he was a teenager. He and his siblings were raised by their grandmother in Hoskins, in west Charlotte. Ambitious and trusted, Phil Berry was driving a school bus at age 16—he'd park the bus and then go inside Plato Price High School for school himself and later drive it back through the route again on his way home. He excelled at science and math, and was the county's first black Eagle Scout, the highest rank in Boy Scouts. This was just one of several key firsts in his life.

After high school, he joined the Air Force as a way to pay for college. Still reaching, he earned a bachelor's degree in Engineering and then master's degree in the same field while still enlisted in the service.

The conflict in Vietnam took Mr. Berry to southeast Asia where he worked as a navigator on large bombers, based in Thailand for several tours. He returned home to work not in engineering, but in banking and was soon named the first black vice president at NCNB, then North Carolina National Bank but now known as Bank of America. He was a banker who gave many lower income people in Charlotte a fair shake at becoming homeowners when other lenders would not.

While working at the bank, Mr. Berry worked with the task force that used busing to integrate the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. This project succeeded where schools in northern states did not. Next, he ran for the school board where he felt he could make a difference and bring about change. By now he had three young children and a wife and was focused on making education fair and equal for all races, his kids included. He won that seat on the school board and began a political career that would last until his death. His next step was becoming the chairman of the school board, a role he held for nearly a decade until he ran for the NC House in 1980. Due to his popularity in the state and its largest city, he was elected to that seat, too.

Mr. Berry was popular and effective in the state house and was running unopposed for the NC Senate in 1984 when he was diagnosed with stage 4 Lymphoma. The cancer took his life on October 21, 1984, just weeks before the election. He was survived by three kids, three wives and an enormous host of accomplishments, all achieved in just 44 short years.