

Ridgeway Mayor Is State's Mother of the Year



Mrs. Laura Thomas

by Gladys Adilah Shabazz

She's a very busy lady. The mayor of the historic yet modern town of Ridgeway. Mother of three, a kind and helpful soul to many, and proprietor and owner of one of the oldest establishments in the town — the Thomas Company, Inc.

She is Laura Thomas, citizen extraordinaire. Now she has one more title to add to her long list of accomplishments — South Carolina's 1992-93 Mother of the Year.

Mrs. Thomas, the quick witted, accomplished mother, businesswoman and town official, said she was surprised yet very honored to have been chosen Mother of the Year for the state.

She was surprised, but she shouldn't have been. Her work and years of community involvement speak for themselves. She has been an unselfish care giver to her family and others for many years. This is an honor she richly deserves.

Mrs. Thomas' own mother was a S.C. Mother of the Year herself. Mrs. Thomas is proud of that fact. She said she just hopes she can live up to her mother's accomplishments.

"I feel humbled that I would be honored for the same thing," she said of her mother's recognition.

"I'm not near the person she said. She raised nine children - seven girls and two boys - had a big farm (the old Muller house in Blythewood was the family homestead). She was on the Richland Welfare Committee. She sat in on meetings where they planned for ways to help abused or homeless children."

Mrs. Thomas said her own mother kept 19 children over the years from ages three months to six years. She opened up her doors to help others. That seems to be Mrs. Thomas' own motto: doing for others who can't do for themselves.

Mrs. Thomas has long been active in her church, St. Stephen's Episcopal, which sponsored her for the Mother

of the Year.

A graduate of the old Blythewood High School, she went on to college, receiving a B.S. degree in Secretarial Education and a master's degree in Secondary Education from the University of South Carolina. She was president of her senior high school class and even played basketball in school.

After college she taught school for a while as a business teacher. Along the way she met her husband, Robert Walton Thomas, who would become one of Ridgeway's most respected and well loved citizens. He was mayor of Ridgeway for a number of years.

Their children are Lee Thomas, a former top level administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, now an executive in Atlanta; Mrs. Eleanor Parrish, a teacher in Camden; and Robert Thomas, who assists his mother in the operation of the family's mercantile and general merchandise business in Ridgeway. They also had another daughter, Laura Thomas Crisp, who died several years ago of cancer.

Talking about her aunt, a niece noted that Mrs. Thomas has always helped take care of her family members. She still drives 40 miles each week to visit her ailing sister. She took care of her mother when she got sick and she did the same for her former husband.

She has shown courage as a mayor in traditional Ridgeway, becoming the first woman to serve, but she has met the task with humor and vigor. "I stay busy," she said, "but there's so much to do.

"At age 70 when most people are enjoying retirement," she continued, "I'm as active as ever." Her niece agrees, "Aunt Laura seems to be just now getting her second wind."

Mrs. Thomas received her Mother of the Year certificate in a ceremony at the Governor's Mansion in March. She will go

on to represent the state at the national awards ceremony in California April 23.