

A Brief History of The Yellow Springs Men's Group¹ **(Operating as "The James A. McKee Group," circa 2007)**

by
Robert L. Harris

In its early years the Men's Group was an informal group which met at various venues in and around the village. During 1992 and 1993 it held breakfast meetings and lunches at "Shoney's" in Springfield (no longer in business), in various homes, and at Young's Dairy.

Retired Yellow Springs' police chief James McKee was instrumental in the organization and recruiting members. As an organizer and promoter of The Men's Group, Jim McKee spent countless hours devoted to obtaining greater black inclusion in: education, politics, and the economic life of Yellow Springs.

Although not deliberately intended to be exclusionary, the group consisted of mostly retired men, hence the name "Men's Group" was adopted as a descriptive term. The group's earliest primary aims were: 1) to improve prospects of the minority community in its political, economical, and educational well-being; 2) to promote racial economic equality and balance, and 3) to assist minority members of the community in achieving their fullest developmental potential, with emphasis on young African-American. Reflecting these goals, top priorities of the group were documentation of contributions that blacks had made to the development of Yellow Springs, and fighting job discrimination.

1994

The Yellow Springs Men's Group (YSMG) became a formal organization in 1994 with its first President, James A. McKee. The group drafted a formal constitution plus a set of bylaws to govern activities. Among the signers of that first draft were: James A. McKee, Norris Bayless, L. Shelbert Smith, and Paul Richardson. The organization's emphasis and orientation remained on "uplifting the black community." A section of its draft Mission Statement read:

"This group is organized to improve the perspective of the minority community relative to its political, economical, and educational well-being. It is designed and organized to promote equality and balance, as well as to assist minority members of the community in achieving their fullest potential in all phases of life, with special emphasis on young blacks."

Documenting blacks and their contributions to Yellow Springs remained a guiding theme for many years. A major early activity was videotaping of elder blacks in the community to prepare a history of their contributions. A number of tapes were made using the talents of Col. Edward Rice; however the project faltered when Col. Rice left the project.

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1995

In 1995 the YSMG opened a bank account as a non-profit organization with the Springfield Federal Savings Bank which later became Cornerstone Bank.. Several community issues were addressed by sending prepared statements-of-position to The Village Council and/or The Yellow Springs News.

A documented Summary-of-Accomplishments for 1995 included:

- Adopting a *Mission Statement* for the YSMG.
- Establishment of the YSMG as: “...*an unstructured and informal, but proactive body.*”
- Supporting the closing of YSHS campus with a letter to the editor in The Yellow Springs News.
 - Encouraging The Village of Yellow Springs to advertise job openings: “...*so that women, blacks, and other minor'ies will have an opportunity to apply.*”
 - Participation in *The Employability Workshop* in conjunction with The Urban League of Springfield.
 - Meeting with officials of The Antioch Publishing Company for discussions of their practices on hiring and the promotion of blacks and minorities.
 - Sponsoring its first “Candidates Night” which replaced The League of Women’s Voters “Meet The Candidates” event.
 - Preparation of an initial listing of all the black businesses in Yellow Springs.
 - Organizing of a forum for discussing zoning and health department violations that concerned the habitation of a temporary structure on a vacant lot on West College Street, near The Omar Park Estates.
 - Setting up training session with Dayton Access Television (DATV) for video-camera operation and editing. This was an extension of The Men’s Group effort to videotape interviews with blacks, to document their contributions to the Yellow Springs’ community.

Speakers at meetings of the YSMG in 1995 included:

- Robert Burton, CPA and former African-American mayor of Springfield, Ohio.
- Representatives from: “Concerned Citizens Coalition of Yellow Springs.
- Kenneth Yonkee, Superintendent of Yellow Springs Schools.
- John Gudgel, Acting Principal, YSHS.
- Randall Newsome, Principal, Mills Lawn School.
- Joseph Lewis, Councilman, Yellow Springs Village Council.
- Dale Henry, Mayor, Springfield, Ohio.
- David Heckler, Yellow Springs Village Manager.
- Jo Scott, Assistant Yellow Springs Village Manager.
- Lehr Dircks, Clerk, Miami Township. Trustees.
- Antioch Professor Oliver Loud,
- Hardy Trolander, a founder of YSI.
- Al Stewart

On June 28th 1995 the Men’s Group organized and hosted a luncheon with ministers of black churches in Springfield and Yellow Springs. Its purpose was to discuss problems that existed in

both minority communities, and to devise strategies to overcome them. The meeting aimed at empowering minorities in areas of jobs training and employment. Among those attending were: Norris Bayless; Andrew Benning; Orlando Brown; Wilbur Brown; Harold Cordell; Rev. Nathan Beavers, Jr.; Rev. John Freeman; Paul Graham; Rev. Charles L. Jones; Rev. Jewel D. Jones; Rev. Robert Lanier; Rev. Cecil Pratt; Ted Jackson; Nathaniel Lawson; James McKee; James Phillips; Edward Rice; Rev. Charles Robinson; James S. Smith; L. Shelbert Smith; Rev. James Tate; and Earl Walker. Those invited but who did not attend were: Joseph Anthony, Paul Ford, Edgar Jordan, James Phillips, and Paul Richardson. The meeting took place at The Bryan Center and was catered by Shirley Ragans.

1996

In January 1996 the Men's Group's initial Recorded-Certificate-of-State was signed by then Secretary-of-The-State-of-Ohio, Bob Taft. Also in January, its Articles of Incorporation were signed by: James McKee, President; Norris Bayless, Vice-President; L. Shelbert Smith, Treasurer; and Paul Richardson, Secretary. In February the YSMG obtained a federal "Employee Identification Number" from the Internal Revenue Service. During July the Men's Group adopted its first Bylaws and Constitution. In 1996 The League of Women Voters, Inc. discontinued its "Meet-The-Candidates" meetings in Yellow Springs and the Men's Group stepped into the void with L. Shelbert Smith serving as its organizer and chairman.

A letter was written by YSMG Secretary Paul Richardson to *The Yellow Springs News* urging citizens to vote. A "Career-Modeling Project" initiative was begun in conjunction with the Springfield Urban League. A set of guidelines for group involvement in political issues was prepared for discussion.

In November 1996 the YSMG held its first annual Board Meeting at the Bryan Center attended by: James A. McKee, President; Norris Bayless,; L. Shelbert Smith, Paul Richardson, Reuben Chaney, and Ted Jackson. The following topics were on the agenda:

- Sponsorship of the second "Candidates Night." community meeting.
- Voter Transportation Efforts.
- Guidelines for Political Involvement for group members.
- The Video-taping project.

1997

In 1997 John Hart and Ron Schmidt became the first white members to join the YSMG.

The Annual Board Meeting of December 1997 had on its agenda:

- The Video-taping Project.
- Progress getting minority teachers into the Yellow Springs school system.
- Minority career-modeling efforts.
- The Voter Transportation Efforts.

Achievements during that year were: "Candidates Night." Among the speakers before the group during the year were: John Gudgel and Faith Daegele, a YSHS tutor. Between 1997 and 1998

the YSMG met bi-weekly at The Bryan Center with member Andy Benning providing the luncheon arrangements on a reimbursed basis. A hallmark of the period was Jim McKee and Jim Smith's house-to-house distribution of the meeting's notices to members. The group had 25 members and its assets were \$1,576.00. Dues were \$35.00.

1998

In 1998 James A. McKee was named the group's *Ohio Statutory Agent*. Candidates Night was held in October. At the November meeting the topic of "Open Membership & Reach-Out Initiative" was discussed, resulting in a concerted effort to recruit women into the YSMG. At the Annual Board meeting on December 9th the Board addressed the composition of the Group, which was exclusively men. Attention was drawn to the Constitution which read: "...Any Yellow Springs citizen upon application...shall be deemed a member of The Group..." Open discussions concerned the topic of whether or not the name of the Group was presumed to be exclusive of females, notwithstanding the language of the Constitution to the contrary. Speakers who addressed the group included:

- Chris Zurbuchen, YS Council
- Dr. John Fleming, Curator, African-American Museum & Cultural Ctr., Wilberforce, OH.
- Don Hollister, Village Council
- John Gudgel, Joan Dungey, Alicia Peters - YS School System

Achievements in 1998 included:

- Candidates Night"
- YS "Historical Perspective Committee Initiative"
- Voter "Transportation-to-the-Polls" Initiative.

1999

Achievements included - Candidates Night. Election of officers resulted in James McKee, President; Ron Schmidt, Vice-President; Paul Richardson, Secretary (w/Robert Harris as 'back up'); and Norris Bayless, Treasurer.

Speakers before the group included:

- Tom Allen, President, Vernay Laboratories, and Doug Ericson, Chief Environmental Engineer
- Faith Patterson & Karen Patterson, "African-American Cross-Cultural Works"
- Tony Armocida, Superintendent, Marilyn Dowdell, Treasurer, YS Schools, John Gudgel, Principal, YS High School.
- Marilyn Dowdell, Treasurer, YS School System
- Marianne McQueen, Community Services Representative.
- Angela Wright, YS School Board

2000

In 2000 the YSMG renewed its "*Ohio Certificate of Continued Existence*." A group of its members created "The Investment Club of Yellow Springs" - an educational partnership to learn about investing.

At the February meeting the YSMG changed its orientation from ‘improving prospective of minorities,’ to ‘improving prospective of the total community.’

During the year the first YSMG Strategic Plan was developed. The first “Magic Show” Scholarship Fund-Raiser was held in the high school gym. Candidates Night was held October 26th.

Among the speakers to the group in 2000 were:

- Marcia Williamson, 3rd grade teacher.
- Tom Haughsby, President, YS School Board.
- Jeffrey Huntington, President, Huntington Instruments, Inc.
- Jerri Connors, Bennett Associates, Inc. Hired by Village Council to recruit and search for a new Village Manager.
- Tony Armocida, Superintendent, YS Schools
- Brad Newsome, YS High School basketball coach.

2001

In 2001 the YSMG made minor changes to its Constitution and Bylaws in preparing groundwork for IRS 501©)(3) status as a federal non-profit organization. In June, its first James A. McKee Scholarship fund-raiser was held in the high school gym - “The Festival of Magic.” It was a huge success. On May 12, 2001, the YSMG sponsored a community forum: “Safe Drinking Water.” On November 1 the group sponsored “Candidates Night.”

Among the speakers before the group during 2001 were:

- Tom Allen, President, Vernay Laboratories
- Hazel Latson, Village Council member
- Tony Arnet, Village Council President
- Samuel Young, Owner of Mill Works, Inc.
- Marsha Leonard, Superintendent, Greene County Career Center.
- Steven Sutcliffe, Treasurer, Greene County Career Center.
- George Pittstick, YS Village Council
- Jeff Singleton, Executive Director, Friends Care Center.
- Tony Armocida, Superintendent, YS Schools & John Gudgel, Principal, YS High School.
- Rob Hillard, YS Village Manager.

2002

The group received official approval as an IRS 501©)(3) non-profit organization. Among the events during the year were the second Magic Show Scholarship Fund-raiser, and Candidates Night.

Its guests included representatives from The Yellow Springs Jewish Men’s Group and speakers before the group included:

- Lee Morgan, CEO, The Antioch Company

- Rob Hillard, YS Village Manager
- Dan Dixon, President, TLA, Inc.
- Eric Marcus, Candidate for Greene County Commission.

Achievements in 2002 included:

- Sponsorship of the *Village Income Tax Forum*
- James A. McKee Scholarship Award

2003

On January 18, 2003 the YSMG experienced the death of its president, James A. McKee. Vice-President Ron Schmidt assumed role of Acting-President.

In February Barbara Boettcher became the first women to join the YSMG.

Later that year James Smith, a Charter Member, died.

Achievements in 2003 were:

- Award of the James A. McKee Scholarship Award.
- Award of the first ‘Community Leadership Award..’
- Sponsorship of ‘Candidates Night’.
- Sponsorship of the Yellow Springs “Cost-of-Living” community meeting.
- Sponsored the “Magic Show” fund-raiser for The James McKee Scholarship.

Speakers before the group during 2003 included:

- Dan Young, Owner, Young’s Dairy
- John Struewing, Planning Board
- Mary Alexander, Village Council
- Andree Bognar, YS Social Worker
- Barbara Bookshire, CEO of Homemaker Services of Greene County
- Mary Morgan, YS Historical Society
- David Etling, Pgm. Coordinator, “Structures of Service Program,” Antioch College
- Tony Armocida, Superintendent, YS Schools
- Ms. Wehrley-Pyles, Owner, “Mama’s Midnight Bakery of Yellow Springs.”

2004

YSMG activities in 2004 included:

- Establishment of the Scholarship Endowment Fund with the YS Community Foundation,
- Participation in the *Cost-of-Living Analysis* seminar at Wright State Univ.
- Award of the James A. McKee Scholarship Award,
- Sponsor of a ‘Monte Carlo’ fund-raising scholarship party.
- Dedication of “James A. McKee Way,” memorial street for West Limestone Street,

Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Speakers before the group in 2004 were:

- Colin Aultman, Fire Chief, Miami Township Fire Rescue.
- Betsy Newman, Yellow Springs' Chamber-of-Commerce.
- Lisa Arose, Greene County Partnerships for Success.

Carl Bor, Yellow Springs Police Chief, Yellow Springs.

- Krista Magaw, Executive Director, Tecumseh Land Trust.
- Ted Donnell, *The Leeds Program*. (Energy-Efficient housing).
- Marianne McQueen, Director, Yellow Springs Home, Inc. and Lindie Keaton, Homebuyer Coordinator for YS Home, Inc,
- Dave Foubert. Mayor, Yellow Springs, and June Allison, YS Clerk-of-Courts.
- Dr. Ignacio Sarmina, M.D. - "Treatment options for enlarged prostate glands, including the Indigo Laser Treatment, Drug Therapy Option, Surgical Options, and Minimally-Invasive Treatments."

○ Connie Pelekoudas, Treasurer of Board of Trustees, Yellow Springs Senior Citizens, and Rodney Bean, Director, Yellow Springs Senior Citizens.

- Barbara Boettcher, YSMG member - "*Estate Planning*."
- Ann Filemyr, Director, Yellow Springs' Health Survey.
- Greg Felder, Director of Physician's Services, Greene County Memorial Hospital.
- Dan Young, Chairman, Community Resources Board, and Jim Walker, Community Resources Corporation.

- Dr. Barbara Gellman-Danley, President, McGregor School, Antioch University.
- Fran Rickenbach, President, Yellow Springs Community Foundation.

2005

YSMG activities in 2005 included:

- Sponsorship of "The Second Annual Yellow Springs' Community Forum" held at Wright State University. (March 26th)

YSMG events during 2005 included:

- The "Monte Carlo" fundraiser, held at Antioch College. (May 7th)
- Annual James A. Fosmab "Carlo" fundrai[n]g event at Antioch College.

2006

YSMG activities in 2006 included:

- Sponsorship of “The Community Information Project.”

YSMG events during 2006 included:

- “Festival of Magic” fundraiser.
- Annual James A. McKee Scholarship Awards
- Annual Founder's Award

Speakers before the group in 2006 were:

- Eric Swansen, Yellow Springs Village Manager.
- John Grote, Yellow Springs' Police Chief.
- Dan Young, Jim Walker, and Carol Gasho (“Yellow Springs and Miami Township Community Improvement Corp.”)
- Marsha Leonard, Superintendent, Greene County Career Center.

2007

In 2007 the YSMG changed its name to “**The James A. McKee Group**” (“**Jim's Group**”). The name reflected two major realities. First, “Mens Group” was never meant to be gender exclusive. Its Constitution and Bylaws always explicitly stated: “*Any citizen upon application, acceptance of application, and payment of membership fees shall be deemed a member of The Group.*” Second, its founder, Jim McKee, was the guiding light and inspiration for members throughout his life, and no better-fitting memorial to his ideals could be expressed than by renaming this group after him.

YSMG events in 2007 included:

- James A. McKee Scholarship Award.
- Candidates Night.
- Annual Founder's Award.

Speakers before the group in 2007 were:

- Dana Patterson, Dir. Coretta Scott King Center, Antioch College.
- Tony Armocida, Superintendent, Yellow Springs School System.
- Richard Lapedes & Joy Kitzmiller, New Superintendent & Treasurer, Yellow Springs School System.
- Lee Morgan, CEO, Antioch Bookplate, Inc.
- Rick Omlar, President, Yellow Springs Instruments, Inc.
- Len Kramer, Chairman, Community Round Table.
- Ellen Hoover, President, Yellow Springs Chamber of Commerce.
- Colin Altman, Miami Township Emergency Medical Services.

2008

During 2008 one of the group's original members its most ardent and respected supporters, Dr. L. Shelbert Smith, died. A retired college professor, renown local educator, and known to everyone associated with education in Yellow Springs, he helped guide the direction of the Men's Group during it's formative years.

Jim's Group ongoing activities during 2008 were:

- The Community Information Project.
- Planning for a series of financial workshops and seminars on life-after-retirement, and money management.
- Continued development of its organization web site [www.45387.org].

Events during 2008 included:

- James A. Mckee Scholarship Award.
- Founder's Award.

Speakers before the group in 2008 were:

- Mark Crocket, Miami Township Trustee.
- Anne Erickson, Yellow Springs School Board member.
- Scott Saunders, Director of "Antiochiana," Antioch College's Archival Collection.
- Robert Harris, Founder and Vice-President of The African-American Genealogy Group of the Miami Valley.
- Norm Glissmann, Yellow Springs School Superintendent, and Joy Kitzmiller, Treasurer, Yellow Springs School System.
- Karl Zolar, Administrator, Yellow Springs Community Friends Care Center.
- Jeff Campbell, Contract Agent for NBC-TV, "The Olympics and My Visit to China."
- Eric Swansen, Yellow Springs Village Manager.
- John Gudgel, Principal, Yellow Springs High School.
- Larry Gault, V.P., Operations, Greene Memorial Hospital.

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