

47 Years Later, Smith College Student Will Return to Be Honored

“Gail Blattenberger of Princeton, NJ came to the Nation’s Oldest City for a six-week tutorial program teaching black students Mathematics, but became a victim of an attempted fire-bombing”

Gail Blattenberger was a graduate of Princeton High School in New Jersey and a sophomore at Smith College in East Hampton, Massachusetts. During the summer of 1965, she along with 29 other students from the North came to St. Augustine to take part in a tutorial program arranged by Chaplains from Dartmouth College and Yale University. Miss Blattenberger taught Mathematics to high school level students of the community, at Florida Memorial College.



While visiting, Miss Blattenberger stayed at the home of Mrs. Loucille Plummer, a Black Civil Rights Activist and Secretary for the State Headquarters of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As Mrs. Plummer and her guests were sitting around in the house, her son Eric saw three white men speed off in a truck after a beach



ball filled with kerosene, wrapped in burlap, and set afire, was thrown beneath a 100-gallon gas tank outside of her home. Mrs. Plummer and Miss Blattenberger raced outside, seeing the flames reaching 20 feet in the air. They doused the flames with water. The cap blew off of the gas tank which was empty and did not explode. A strong odor of kerosene or gasoline was reported by a fire department spokesman.

In a 1965 Associated Press Article, the St. Augustine Fire Chief B.M. Hall said that the fire, “*definitely was set by someone*” and he would ask the state fire marshal to investigate the attempted arson. This AP story went all over the country.

Ms. Blattenberger now lives in Salt Lake City, where she has been professor of economics at the University of Utah. She will be a special guest at the **6th Annual Freedom Trail Luncheon** on July 2nd. ACCORD is organizing this event to remember, recognize and honor the courage and sacrifices of those heroes and sheroes who contributed to the success of the civil rights movement. July 2nd marks the 48th anniversary of the signing of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was brought about by demonstrations on the streets of St. Augustine. The luncheon will take place in the elegant and historic Ponce de Leon Hotel dining room--scene of many important civil rights episodes--on the campus of Flagler College.

Dr. Martin Luther King went from the Ancient City to the White House for the signing, and a few months later was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. For information and tickets please call Audrey at (904) 829-3996 or visit www.accordfreedomtrail.org.