

Joyce Gilmer

Workplace Equality



After a military assignment brought them to Colorado Springs in 1969, Lawrence and Joyce Gilmer divorced. Joyce decided to stay and raise their three children Keith, Kim, and Karen here. Needing a good income and maximum flexibility as a single mother, Joyce went to real estate school. After acing her exam, she worked for Mr. Sapp, and later Sam Hunter before opening her own company – Joyce Realty in 1976 – becoming the first Black woman real estate broker in Colorado Springs. Owning her own business allowed Joyce to be successful at real estate and motherhood; both jobs she loved.

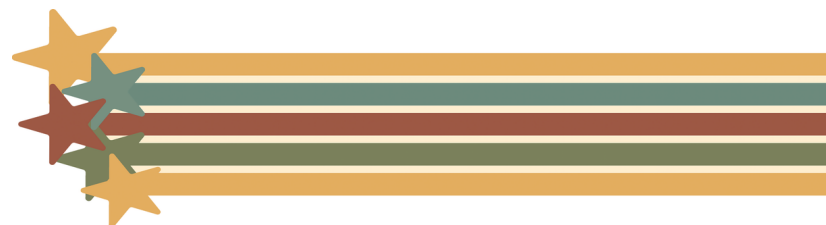
Despite Joyce's success, she and other women of her era faced significant workplace discrimination. Prior to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act barring employment discrimination based on sex, women often lost jobs after marriage or during pregnancy. The landmark Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 strengthened Title VII, prohibiting workplace discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, and marital or familial status. Additionally, it created the Equal Opportunity Commission to administer and enforce civil rights laws in the workplace.

In the 1940s, interested locals met at First Congregational Church and formed the Interracial Fellowship Group, which later became the Colorado Springs Unity Council. They investigated barriers to employment, advocated for change, and challenged unequal hiring practices. As a result, Robert Washington became the first Black taxi driver, Alice McAdams and Eglantine Wilson were the first Black students at Beth El Nursing School, and Nina Stroud Pellerin was the first Black school teacher in 1954.

Additionally, until the 1974 Equal Credit Opportunity Act allowed women to obtain credit cards and bank loans in their own names, many women needed a husband or father to cosign a home mortgage and car loan, or to open a checking account. Unfortunately, despite the 1963 Equal Pay Act, women today earn \$0.81 for every dollar earned by men, a million-dollar difference over a 40-year career. A 2023 report by the GAO notes that although women make up nearly half of the American workforce, workplace equality is still a “work in progress.”



Colorado Springs
PIONEERS MUSEUM



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Joyce Brown dreamed of going to college – but for many years it felt impossible. After high school she worked in Chicago before marrying Lawrence Gilmer. He served in the Air Force and the family moved to Colorado Springs in 1969. The couple divorced but Joyce decided to stay and raise their children Keith, Kim, and Karen here.

After becoming a successful real estate broker, she enrolled part-time at UCCS. Seven years later in 1983, she earned a B.A. at age 47. Unfortunately, when Joyce picked up her graduation gown, it was the wrong size. Determined to receive her diploma in front of family and friends, she decided to make her own gown and went looking for fabric.

After hours of searching in vain, Joyce was exhausted and feeling distraught, declaring, “I’m not going to graduation.” Going home to rest, she recalled, “I came home, got in my bed...laid back and looked up. My draperies were the exact gold antique satin.” A joyful Joyce graduated wearing her draperies!



Joyce Gilmer receiving her Business Degree at the 1983 UCCS Commencement Ceremony

**Joyce Gilmer Collection at CSPM
Generously donated by Karen Gilmer**

