



## Willis Jones Bradford Jr.

September 16, 1937 - November 29, 2021

Willis Jones Bradford Jr. passed away on November 29th. He was born in Pine Log Georgia, September 16, 1937 to Willis and Lucile Bradford.

He grew up in Cartersville and was the class president his senior year at Cartersville High. He attended Emory University and Georgia State University, where he attained his bachelor's degree. It was at Georgia State that he met Gail. They married in 1960 and later had two children, Kimberly and Brad.

Willis began his association with the YMCA in 1960 with the Atlanta YMCA. He worked part time as he finished school, and ultimately decided to pursue a career in Y work, becoming a full-time employee and serving the Northside Branch of the Atlanta YMCA as the Community Secretary. In 1963, he was recommended to the Board of Management in Prattville, Alabama, for consideration as the Executive of the Prattville YMCA branch by Mr. Bill Chandler, the Executive Secretary of the Montgomery YMCA. At that time, the Prattville YMCA was in organization and was operating as a branch of the Montgomery Y. Willis became the Executive Secretary of the Prattville YMCA on November 1, 1963 and he and Gail moved to Prattville along with their young daughter Kim. Not long after moving to Prattville, their late son Brad was born. This starting point began a 59 year connection with the Prattville YMCA, along with Prattville and Autauga County. Willis started his Prattville Y career working from the trunk of his car, teaching swim lesson in the backyard

pool of a Y Board Member, coaching a basketball team in an asphalt parking lot and establishing programs for people of all ages wherever he could find a place to have a gathering. Ultimately, the Prattville YMCA gained its own charter in 1965 and built a new YMCA facility on East Main Street. He helped to lead the Prattville Y from an upstart branch, to become one of the most respected YMCAs in the country; at one time being statistically proven to be “The Largest small-town YMCA in the Country” by the YMCA of the USA. He led the Y through 5 different building campaigns and the construction of the YMCA Field of Dreams, working closely with a stalwart group of volunteer board members, most of who were so committed to the organization that they still serve or served as board members throughout their lifetimes. In January of 2000, The Board of Trustees of the Prattville YMCA voted to name the recently opened Prattville East YMCA Branch the Willis Bradford Branch in honor of his commitment to the YMCA and the Prattville Community. Willis retired as the General Director and CEO of the Prattville YMCA in December of 2012, having served in this role for 49 years. Immediately upon his retirement, he was elected as a Life Board member of the Prattville YMCA Board of Management and

continued to actively serve as a member of the Board of Trustees of the YMCA, a role he had been elected to in 1994. In September of 2018, Willis was installed as a member of the second class of the Hall of Fame of the YMCAs of the Southeast at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, North Carolina; a place that was very near to his heart for more than 60 years. He spent many summer days taking young people from both Atlanta and Prattville to experience the joy of a Tri Hi Y, YMCA Youth in Government or YMCA Christian Values Conference there at Blue Ridge. In 1991, the YMCA began a partnership with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to recognize an outstanding high school senior student athlete from each high school in Autauga County and the YMCA Board established the Willis Bradford Christian Leadership Award and funded a scholarship to be awarded

to one outstanding young person each year. This tradition that has continued annually to this day and is a highly respected recognition in the community.

Willis firmly believed that a YMCA Director should be actively involved in other community affairs outside the Y, and he demonstrated that by example throughout his entire career and continued to serve the Prattville community until his death. He helped found the United Services of Autauga County, the forerunner to the United Way efforts in Autauga County in the mid 1960's and served as its volunteer Executive Director throughout his career and into retirement. He was actively involved in every United Way Campaign in Autauga County for more than 50 years. He loved the Prattville-Autauga County Public Library and was currently serving as the Board Chairman and was a Board member for more than 25 years. He was an instrumental part of the group who worked to establish the Autauga-Western Elmore ARC and the Louise M. Smith Development Center to help serve the special needs community in the community. Willis was a founding and active member of the Prattville Kiwanis Club, as well as a member of the Board of the Prattville Baptist Hospital at the time of his death. Previously, he served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Bank of Prattville and subsequently a member of the Regional Advisory Board for Whitney Bank.

As busy as he was in the community and the YMCA, Willis never wavered in his commitment to his faith in Jesus Christ, his family, or his church. His commitment to God and his faith in Christ was evident in everything that he did and in every interaction he had. A lifelong Methodist, Willis was an active member of Prattville First United Methodist Church for almost 60 years. He served on most every committee and role in the life of the Church over those many years, serving as the Chairman of several on numerous occasions.

Willis was preceded in death by his son Willis Jones Bradford III (Brad) and

Sammy Bradford (brother). He is survived by Gail, Kim, Steve Sloan (son-in-law), two grandchildren; Taylor (Omar Abu-Alrub) & Allison Sloan, and great granddaughter Raina Abu-Alrub.

Services for Willis Bradford will be held on Saturday, December 4, 2021, with a private family burial at Prattville Memorial at 10am to be followed by a public Memorial Service at 11am at Prattville First United Methodist Church with Dr. Tony McCullough and Rev. Gerald Shelton officiating. The family will receive friends in a reception to follow the memorial service in the church fellowship hall. Honorary pallbearers will be Dr. Ed Mullins, Mr. Herb Wilkinson, Mr. Alfred Wadsworth, Mr. Steve Burton, Mr. Harvey Clark and Mr. David Lewis. In lieu of flowers the family request donations be made to Prattville YMCA (PO Box 680009, Prattville, AL 36068) and First United Methodist Church of Prattville (100 E. 4th Street, Prattville, AL 36067).

# Previous Events

## Service

DEC 4. 11:00 AM (CT)

First United Methodist Prattville  
100 E. 4th St.  
Prattville, AL

# Tribute Wall

KP

“ *Willis Bradford was a real prick!*”

Kirk Pusney - May 03, 2025 at 11:21 AM

DH

“ *I had the pleasure, and honor, of working with Willis for 8 years in my capacity as YMCA of the USA Management Consultant for Alabama. I have never met a better Y manager or highly-principled professional in my entire 37-year career with the Y. On a personal note, we always shared many laughs during our time together and wonderful dinners with Willis and Gail and our mutual Y friends, Herb and Faye Wilkinson. What a man...a true Y legend. Rest in peace in the glory of our Savior, my friend. You ran the good race and your rewards in heaven will be plentiful!*”

Dan Hecker - December 01, 2021 at 06:25 PM

KH

“ *Mr Bradford was a wonderful person. He helped my Mom and Dad many years ago to get us (my sister and I) in as members of the Prattville Y. Because my Mom and Dad both worked, we would spend summer days at the Y and Mr Bradford and Mr Murray would keep an eye on us. We took swimming lessons and enjoyed many benefits the Y offered. Those were great childhood memories. Mr Bradford will be greatly missed.*”



Kennetha Hall - December 01, 2021 at 03:57 PM

TH

“ I went to Prattville public schools with Willis' daughter, Kim, and remember seeing Willis in his YMCA office nearly every time we played table tennis in the front lobby, with Mr. Murray supervising.

*Sympathies to the Bradford family.*

*Rest in Peace Willis, you sweet child of God.*

*Colonel Tim Hall  
US Air Force, ret.*



---

**Tim Hall** - December 01, 2021 at 01:13 PM

JC

“ The words "Share a Memory" are not enough to describe the "many" memories I have of Mr. Bradford. He was my very first contact at the Prattville YMCA and whenever we saw each other at the Y or anywhere around town, I got a big smile and hug. My brother, Jeff and I spent a lot of time at the YMCA and Mr Bradford was always present and was always interested in what was going on in our lives and how we are doing. He was like part of the family. I moved away in 1997 but whenever I was in town or had a chance, we would touch base. When I lost my brother in 2012, Mr. Bradford contacted me to share his memories and his condolences. There is not enough space or time to describe what a huge presence he was in my life growing up. I thank him for his caring and leadership he provided as well as his friendship. His passing has left a huge void in many lives but none more than you, his family. I am keeping you all in my thoughts and prayers and I pray that the love you feel from the outpouring of "memories" and condolences with help to comfort you. I pray that God wrap His Loving Arms around you all. Mr. Bradford, thank you for the memories. You will be missed greatly by many!

---

**Julie Israel Crowe** - December 01, 2021 at 11:43 AM

BF

“ Barrett, Issiac, Snyder Family purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Willis Jones Bradford Jr..



---

**Barrett, Issiac, Snyder Family** - December 01, 2021 at 10:30 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue* was purchased for the family of *Willis Jones Bradford Jr.*”



---

November 30, 2021 at 08:39 PM