



Ed Adams helped found the Austin chapter of the Urban League.

Prominent black business leader dies

Ed Adams remembered for work in African American communities.

By [Marty Toohey](#)

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Ed Adams, one of IBM's first black executives and a prominent figure among Austin's African American communities, died Tuesday morning. He was 69.

Adams had been suffering from a form of blood cancer since 2004, his wife, Mary Lou Adams, said Tuesday.

"It looked like it was going into remission," said Adams, a nursing professor at the University of Texas. "Then he just faded quickly and slipped away."

Friends and community members remembered Ed Adams as an opinionated and often blunt advocate for social progress generally and for better education in particular.

"He would express himself," said Berl Handcox, the first African American elected to Austin's City Council, "and the way he expressed himself was accepted by most of us."

Adams was raised in New York and in 1956 became the first black graduate of the prestigious Horace Mann School, his wife said. After earning degrees in engineering and business, Adams was hired by IBM and moved to Austin in 1975. He eventually became the company's head of community relations for the western United States.

"Ed Adams was a trailblazer at IBM and highly respected across the Austin area," the company said in a statement.

Adams was a lanky 6-foot-3 and spoke in phrases tinged with the accents of New York and Barbados, where his parents were raised; "split the sheets" was his way of saying people were getting divorced. He talked about food a lot, listened to Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis after dinner and fiddled endlessly with mechanical devices, said the youngest of his three children, 36-year-old Michelle Earley.

He walked in many social circles — including among Austin's business leaders, church groups and education advocates — and bridged the gaps between them.

For instance, as a longtime member of Huston-Tillotson University's board of trustees, Adams used his business connections to raise money for the school during some of its most difficult financial times, said Ora Houston, a university alumnus and fellow member of St. James Episcopal Church. Adams also helped found Austin's chapter of the Urban League, served on the board of directors for St. David's North Austin Medical Center and was a member of numerous education committees and organizations.

He was a leader at St. James, which his family said will host a visitation for him at 7 p.m. Friday.. His funeral will be there at 2 p.m. Saturday.

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