

The life of a mayor

East P.A.'s Mouton charms 60 students

By Mary T. Fortney
Times Tribune staff

East Palo Alto Mayor Barbara Mouton made a guest appearance at Brentwood School this week and received a reception worthy of a star.

Sixty first- and second-graders sat at her feet Tuesday, oohing and ahing at almost everything she said.

They presented her with flowers and quizzed her about the life of a mayor.

In the process, they learned a lot about city government and about Mayor Mouton.

The talk was part of an enrichment program for the accelerated classes at Brentwood.

One student, Shaurice Carr, 7, had written Mouton a letter, declaring, "I love mayors. You must be the best mayor in the country."

Mouton was a little late because she had difficulty finding the room, so the teacher kept the youngsters quiet by telling them, "It's time to practice patience."

When Mouton entered, the students lined up to present flowers — gladioluses, tiger lilies and roses.

Mouton turned the flower gifts into a little sermon, saying, "With all of our colors and shapes, we can get together and be a beautiful bouquet, just like these flowers."

The mayor had brought some items for a show-and-tell session, including a musical instrument and a basket from Africa.

"As mayor, I go to a lot of places — Washington, D.C., Boston, Atlanta," Mouton said, setting off a cre-

scendo of oohs as students responded to the glamour of travel.

Mouton explained why East Palo Alto decided to incorporate and how the city budgets its money.

Then the students ventured into more personal questions.

Olivia Han, 7, asked, "What's your favorite color?"

"Hot pink," Mouton replied. "When I was with the Nairobi Day School, my office was all in hot pink."

Another student asked her favorite foods. The answer was, "Greens, asparagus, artichokes, crab."

Banji Sanders, 7, asked if the mayor went to the library. Mouton said she did, at least once a week.

Terrell Gibson, 7, asked, "Is it hard as a mayor to make decisions?"

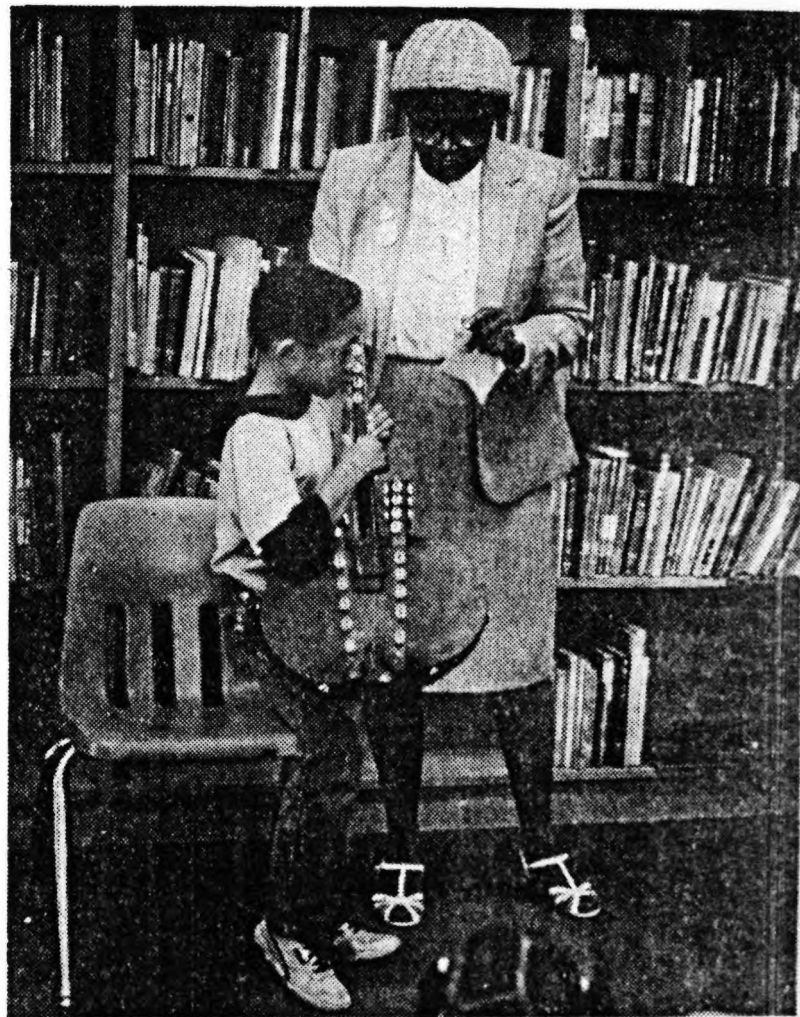
Mouton replied that it wasn't so difficult because she shared the decision-making with the City Council and city staff.

Cynthia Boulding, 7, asked if she liked being mayor. Mouton said she does.

But Mouton said that life isn't always perfect for a mayor.

When asked what she liked least about being mayor, she said, "This is a small town and everybody knows where I live. Sometimes when I go home, real tired, the phone rings and someone says, 'Mrs. Mouton, the lights are out in front of my house.' It's something they should have called a city department about."

But, she added, this only bothers her when she's tired.



Times Tribune staff photo by Renee Lynn
Galen Kirkman, 7, plays a guitar East Palo Alto Mayor Barbara Mouton brought back from her travels in Africa.

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