



George Davis Jr.

December 7, 2015

George Davis, Jr., a longtime union and civil rights leader who, out of the spotlight, worked to help individuals and the community, died Monday in his South Toledo home. He was 88.

He had been recovering from health woes after a fall in early August, his son Calvin said.

In 2012, Mr. Davis was among honorees recognized at an annual luncheon of the African American Legacy Project of Northwest Ohio.

Mr. Davis went to work at Willys-Overland Motors at age 15 and retired in 1993 as a representative for Local 12, United Auto Workers.

In between, he became the first African-American appointed as a union steward and served as chairman of the Jeep unit. He was on the Jeep executive committee and, when the former American Motors Corp. owned the Toledo plant, Mr. Davis was a leader in a UAW intra-corporate council. In retirement, he was on the state board of UAW's Community Action Program.

"His mind never stopped," said Lloyd Mahaffey, retired UAW regional director. "He was thinking all the time about what's next and what we need to do."

Mr. Davis was first called to leadership by the late Richard T. Gosser, the legendary UAW leader, Mr. Mahaffey said. When Mr. Gosser contacted him, he said, "'George, I want you to be a chief steward at the plant,'" Mr. Mahaffey said. "That was a full-time job and a big job. George said, 'I'm willing to do it, but I don't want to be chief steward just for people of color. I want to represent everybody.' Dick [Gosser] said, 'If you said anything else, I wouldn't want you.'"

Mr. Davis emphasized labor and management working together, said Ray Wood, president of UAW Local 14 and president of the Toledo Branch, NAACP, a post formerly held by Mr. Davis.

"He was a strong union leader who represented his people with passion and commitment," Mr. Wood said. "I think he was one of the first guys in the community who realized it had to be a partnership."

The local leaders he admired "got involved in every aspect of the community through labor, politics, and civil rights," Mr. Davis' son Calvin said. And Mr. Davis followed their example. William Brower, the late Blade columnist and associate editor, wrote in 1982 that three decades of Mr. Davis' life were entwined with the Toledo branch of the NAACP.

"He first made his imprint as a nuts-and-bolts member - and later chairman - of several key committees of the civil rights organization," Mr. Brower wrote. "Then he spent more than five years as first vice president before finally yielding to persistent - but friendly - arm twisting to take charge."

Mr. Davis had separate stints as president, in the early 1980s and in the early 1990s.

Some criticized him as emphasizing membership more than activism, Mr. Brower wrote, but Mr. Davis believed that fund-raising and membership building were leverage to gain economic and political power.

The Toledo branch solved "problems of discrimination just by sitting down with the right people," Mr. Davis told The Blade in 1983.

"The most essential thing is to have a good working relationship with the power structure of the community," Mr. Davis said. "You don't need a lot of hell-raising and publicity to get that done."

Mr. Wood, the current NAACP president who has known Mr. Davis since childhood, said he "encouraged me to get involved and do my best, and he was there as a mentor."

"He was a strong-willed man, and that's what people look for in leaders," Mr. Wood said. "He wasn't arrogant and didn't want to be in the spotlight."

Mr. Davis was a former vice chairman of the Lucas County Democratic Party and precinct committeeman.

He was born July 11, 1927, to Polly Ann and George Davis and grew up on Scott Street near downtown. From the age of 6, he sold newspapers and did odd jobs to help the

family in the Depression. He was a Scott High School student when he went to work at Willys-Overland. He was a veteran of the Army Air Corps, serving stateside.

Mr. Davis' wife of 25 years, Gladys, died in 2002.

Surviving are his sons, George III, Larry, Calvin, and Norman; stepdaughters Helen and Patricia Webb; stepsons Walter Webb III and Robert Webb; four grandchildren; three great-grandchildren, as well as step-grandchildren and step-great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 5-8 p.m. Monday in Dale-Riggs Funeral Home Chapel. Services will be noon Tuesday in St. Mark's Baptist Church, with family hour at 11 a.m.

The family suggests tributes to St. Mark's Baptist, where he was a longtime member.

Comments



“ Our sincere condolences to the family. Our thoughts and prayers go out to you. We both so admired George, as a family man, as a friend, and as a Union Brother. He was a GREAT man who left his mark in this world. He will be missed by many. Thanks for everything George.

Ron and Brenda Conrad

Ron & Brenda Conrad - December 14, 2015 at 07:18 PM



“ Mr. George Davis Jr. was a friend and mentor for young people in the 60 -70 I was a worker of the Jeep Corporation in 66 and 70 and brother Davis was my Mentor and best Friend his son Norman J Davis Jr. and I were Classmates at Libbey High School But there is one thing about Brother Davis. When he said things to you he meant them he never crossed words with you. that was it. "But a lasted on December 7th The Lord Jesus Christ. Came to him at Home and he went Home to be with the Lord that Day and now he has a seat at the Welcome table. He fought a good fight he finished his course he kept the Faith so now there is a Crown of life that the Righteous Judge will give him on that day So Brother George Davis Jr. Rest on you have earned your Rest.

Rev, James L. Allen
Associate Minister of
Southern Baptist Church



Rev James L.Allen - December 14, 2015 at 01:48 PM



“ DR. FORREST AND MARIE AND STAFF purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of George Davis Jr..



DR. FORREST AND MARIE AND STAFF - December 14, 2015 at 12:48 PM



“ I have many pleasant memories of "Uncle Bubba" as I called him. Having known him all of my life I can truly say whatever he did he put his whole heart into it. I was very proud of all the love he poured into his hard work with the Union and NAACP. I also knew him as a loving family man who truly adored his wife, children and extended family. Whenever asked, Uncle Bubba would show up if he was able. Sometimes I could tell he wasn't feeling well but he wouldn't complain. He supported and encouraged us to go after our dreams. Whenever I would see him, he proudly introduced me as his niece. Uncle Bubba made a footprint in the hearts of many people, I can say this because he made one in mine and I will never forget him. I am praying for you all in your loss of this great man. Love and God bless you, Bunny (daughter of Naomi Britter Sharpley and cousin of Aunt Dorothy Britter's children)

Leslye Colbert (Sharpley) aka "Bunny" - December 14, 2015 at 08:55 AM