

Veteran Sears service technician calls it quits

Special to Sentinel-Voice
While Sears isn't going anywhere, a mainstay of the company's Las Vegas operations is.

In December technician John Stephens punched his last time card, ending a 32-year career with the company where he began as a shipping and receiving clerk.

Trading the time cards for post cards, the 55-year-old San Antonio native plans on hitting the travel circuit and enjoying other leisure pursuits: taking long walks with Missy, his wife of 33 years, revitalizing Black Extravaganza Productions, a minority talent showcase group he co-founded and headed back in 1968 and getting back to his first love, writing.

Using as his mantra, "Always take care of the customer," Stephens earned admiration from many Sears patrons.

He viewed his job as much more than tweaking

appliances, fixing furniture, servicing work orders, and answering customer questions, his co-workers said.

Customers described him as knowledgeable, courteous, friendly, and helpful. His co-workers called his influence patriarchal.

"John is a role model, teacher, and father figure to us," his co-workers have said. "He is always willing to help out and get the job done."

Stephens' career, and life, reads like that of a model employee and civilian.

He began with Sears Aug. 19, 1965, working as a shipping and receiving clerk. After a year, he was transferred to Sears' Las Vegas service repair center, 1415 W. Bonanza Road.

In 1968, Stephens began making waves, first being named courtesy committee chairman, then while assigned to the parts department, completing an electricity and

electronics course which helped him, a year later, to become the first African-American from Las Vegas' service unit to go to the Sears Pacific Coast Territory Training Center School in Glendale, Calif. Stephens was later transferred back to Las Vegas where he became a mechanical technician.

Stephens made an impact in Glendale. In addition to collecting training certificates, he was recruited for the Sears Total Quality Management Team in 1985.

Also that year, he co-founded and became the first editor of "Sears in Gear," the Las Vegas Service Repair store's first and only newspaper.

He was also recognized in the Sears West Coast Associate newspaper for outstanding achievement in his area.

In 1987, he wrote and directed training slides for Sears Associates. He was



Retired and enjoying the good life, John and Missy Stephens, visit the Las Vegas Fine Arts Museum during Black History. *Sentinel-Voice photo by Randy Merritt*

placed on the Sears Action Planning Team the next year. Further padding his resume are outstanding service, courtesy, performance and productivity awards, three Living Legend

Awards, three 1997 Eagle Awards for productivity and a 1996 Circle of Honor Award.

When the Haniski family found out about Stephens retirement, they wrote a letter.

We wanted to "show our appreciation for the fine work you have done on our washer and dryer," the letter said. "We will miss your friendly smile and great service."

History

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the Age of Sail, examines the role black seamen played in creating what came to be Black America. His work will lead many readers to consider the pre-Civil War history of Africans and African-Americans in an entirely new way, as will the companion piece, written by our colleague, Dachell McSween, on the black whaling community that flourished on the island of Nantucket before the Civil War.

Molefi Kete Asante, the renowned Afrocentric scholar, presents a powerful essay asserting that African and African-American history must be made a foundation of our schools' curricula in order to help inspire black schoolchildren to achieve. It is a position that deserves the broadest discussion.

We also include my consideration of President Clinton's awarding last year the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for bravery in battle, to seven black soldiers and sailors — a half-century after their deeds of heroism, as well as a discussion of Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton's important history of the 20th-century civil rights struggle, from their recent book, *Dual Agenda: The African-American Struggle for Civil Rights and Economic Equality*.

You'll also be inspired by our remembrance of Mallie McGriff Robinson, the mother of that American icon, Jackie Robinson. Read it and you'll understand why we say he was his mother's son. And you'll see that M. Denise Dennis' poignant tribute to her family is a

tribute to the heritage of all African-Americans.

Make no mistake. We're not in favor of a distorted, "feel-good" history that pretends some African-Americans, whether male or female, weren't rakes and rascals. No, we want the full version of African-American history — and thus, American history.

We want it because, as Professor Asante makes clear, it is important for our children to understand their ethnic heritage as well as know the truth about history, and their history: That African-Americans have never sat on the sidelines of the great drama of the American experience, watching as others "made history." We've always sought to forge our own path and to take our place as equal members of American society.

That the legacy of the past still inspires the men and women, boys and girls of today is evident in our other articles — in our tribute to five movement stalwarts who passed away last year; in our profiles of accomplished entrepreneurs, Ed Lewis, president of Essence Communications, and Charles M. Collins, the Urban League's senior vice chairman; and in our taking note of the energy and determination of the teens from the youth programs of our Toledo and Pittsburgh affiliates. They marched all the way to our annual conference in Philadelphia. Their determination tells me that rediscovering our history gives us our marching orders for the future.

M. Gasby Greely is Editor-in-Chief of Opportunity Journal.

Cancer

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carcinogens in tobacco," he said. "That's why these early starters are at greater risk later for cancer."

Murry and colleague Dr. Marianna Sockrider, a pediatric pulmonologist, hope to study smoking cessation methods for children and teens — an area little explored.

"There are few smoking cessation programs designed for youth in Texas or nationally, and potential aids such as nicotine patches have not been tested in this population," Sockrider said.

Sockrider says teens start out experimenting and before they realize it, they are "hooked" — often by the late teen years. She offers the following tips for parents:

- Ask questions about your child's friends and their attitudes toward smoking. Discuss peer pressure and their right to make decisions about their health.
- Discuss how easy it is to become addicted to tobacco and how difficult it is to quit. Clear up misunderstandings about smoking such as overestimating how many youths use tobacco.
- Start early and be persistent. The message may get through.

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