

BUSINESS

Detroit's other civil rights icon deserves street name

Special to Sentinel-Voice

For decades, Detroit's automotive industry has been the nation's most dominant and productive economic sector. Entering the industry in droves after World War II, the access African-Americans had to jobs in automaking spawned middle-class lifestyles and greater educational and career options for millions of us.

Ironically, the Black American role in an industry that has produced more American jobs, opportunities and innovations than any other, has never been documented or recognized.

Randi Payton, publisher of *African-Americans On Wheels*, thinks its about time blacks who played key trailblazing roles in this industry be recognized and honored. "Why isn't Ed Davis a nationally recognized

figure, similar in stature to Ms. Rosa Parks?" Payton asks.

Both are renowned in Detroit. Rosa Parks is a famed civil rights figure who refused to bow to segregation in the 1950s. For that contribution to American history, Detroit named Rosa Parks Blvd. in her honor.


On the other hand, Davis, who became a legend in 1940 when he made his debut as the first black franchised automotive dealer in American history, has no such symbol or landmark for his exemplary efforts.

Sixteen years before Parks' encounter on a segregated bus occurred, Davis was selling cars, employing people from his community and bolstering the black role in Motown's booming economy.

An investor in the

Business Exchange

By William Reed,
Publisher of *Who's Who in Black Corporate America*.



community and among his people, Davis was already president of Detroit's Victory Loan and Investment Company by the time Parks refused to yield her seat and ignited the Montgomery, Ala. Bus Boycott.

On Thursday, Jan. 7, in conjunction with the North American International Auto Show, a tribute luncheon was held to honor the car salesman who founded much of the city's Community Relations Commission and was head of

the Detroit transit system.

"Ed Davis has a lifetime of success in the face of adversity. He fought to realize his dream at a time when African-Americans were shut out of any leading roles in industry," says Payton. "In his first sales position, he wasn't even allowed on the showroom floor, but that didn't stop him from succeeding. He looked at what others thought impossible, and made it happen."

When Davis began his automotive career as a salesman in 1939, he was given a secluded office and barred from the showroom floor. But black buyers preferred doing business with him, and through this support Davis became a major player in Detroit's business community. When he got his franchise, black-run businesses' operations were limited to black districts. "I had the advantage of operating in a neighborhood that not only held opportunity, but was congenial to me," states the Davis autobiography, *One Man's Way*.

The movement to honor Davis and increase adoration of blacks in business is bolstered by the National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers, an organization representing

more than 400 minority dealers. Joining AAOV in the tribute to Davis, the executive director of NAMAD says: "As minorities gain more representation in the industry it will benefit everyone."

The event launched the Ed Davis Scholarship Fund to benefit African-American students pursuing a technical or college degree in the automotive field.

As city officials work with the auto industry to rebuild the Motor City, isn't it time the public demanded they put Davis' name up for all to see and realize that outstanding contributions were made by African-Americans in the nation's principal industry, not only in Detroit, but across the nation?

William Reed is publisher of Who's Who in Black Corporate America.

Atlanta becoming popular choice for black middle class

By Patricia J. Mays

ATLANTA (AP) — Four months ago, Ronnie Harris quit his job as a safety engineer for the city of San Antonio, sold all his furniture, leased his four-bedroom ranch house and moved to Atlanta.

Harris, 36 and divorced, didn't have a job or a place to live, but was intent on settling in Atlanta — where he hoped the city's booming economy would fatten his wallet and the growing community of young, upwardly mobile blacks would liven his social calendar.

Harris had also considered moving to Charlotte, N.C., another city with a growing black population.

However, "I chose Atlanta because it's the place to be. It's the black mecca."

Within weeks of his arrival, he landed a job as an insurance adjuster based in Morrow, a south Atlanta suburb.

Harris quickly found out he wasn't alone. This Southern city is overflowing with such transplants, lured

here by a rich mix of job opportunities, black culture and civil rights legacy.

"The climate is good, the cost of living still isn't as bad as New York or L.A., it has a night life," said Raymond Winbush, director of Race Relations Institute at Fisk University in Nashville. "It has everything that most black urban professionals want."

The city, in a region once known for its sprawling cotton plantations, also is home to five historically black colleges, many black celebrities, several urban radio stations, an upscale soul food market, several black theatrical groups, the National Black Arts Festival and the Shrine of the Black Madonna, a renowned black book store.

"My experience in L.A. was you didn't see many blacks at the opera or plays, the things I enjoyed doing," said Millie Cartznes, 49, who moved to Norcross from Los Angeles in August. "Here, I've met so many prominent black authors and artists."

Home to several R&B musicians — including Usher, Toni Braxton, TLC and hip-hop producer Jermaine Dupri — Atlanta is fast-becoming known as the new Motown.

"In terms of the music industry, black music is to Atlanta what black music was to Detroit in the '60s," Winbush said.

From 1990-97, Atlanta has led all other U.S. metropolitan areas in total black population gains with 189,643, according to Census Bureau estimates compiled by William Frey, a demographer at the University of Michigan.

And, although many of the blacks moving to the "city too busy to hate" are educated

and upwardly mobile young professionals, the area also is attracting working-class families and retirees trying to get back to their roots.

"What I saw when I looked at the rich demographics was that Atlanta was attracting all segments of the black population, white-collar and blue-collar," Frey said.

Blacks account for only about 25 percent of the 3.5 million people living in the 20-county metro area. But about two-thirds of the city's 400,000 residents are black.

The city is entrenched in civil rights history. It is home to the white marble tomb where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is buried, the office where he plotted civil rights

strategy and the church where he preached.

Since electing its first black mayor in 1972 — Maynard Jackson — the city has been controlled by black political leaders. Former Mayor Andrew Young was instrumental in bringing the 1996 Olympics to the city.

Through much of this century, blacks abandoned the South for the better economic opportunity elsewhere.

But with an improving racial climate, the South, and Atlanta in particular, are drawing people back home.

During the first half of the 1990s, the South gained more black new residents than any other region.

"Blacks are returning back home to where their roots are and they are coming back and finding a more tranquil urban atmosphere," said Herman "Skip" Mason Jr., a former history professor at Morehouse College.

But despite the tremendous amount of wealth some blacks have accumulated — evident by the black neighborhoods filled with half million-dollar homes — Atlanta still has serious problems.

Thirty-five percent of blacks live below the poverty level, and the city's crime rate is among the nation's highest.

And some community
(See Atlanta, Page 11)

Nails by Trinna

| | |
|----------------------|------|
| PEDICURE | \$22 |
| FULL SET | \$19 |
| FILLS | \$15 |
| MANICURE | \$ 8 |
| AIR BRUSH DESIGNS .. | \$ 8 |

CALL CHERRY
647-6688 ~ 268-5983 pager
1230 W. Owens, Suite 1
— MEN WELCOME —



1999 SPECIALS

ELECT

Tony 

WHITE

NORTH LAS VEGAS CITY COUNCIL

*It's about time -
It's about change....*

Paid for by friends for Tony White, Don Brown Chairman