

Pioneer civil rights fighter James Forman succumbs

Special to Sentinel-Voice

James Forman, a civil rights pioneer who helped inspire young people in the 1960s as a leader of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, has died of colon cancer, his son said Tuesday. Forman was 76.

He died Monday night at a hospice in Washington, where he lived for several years. Forman's son, Chaka Esmond Fanon Forman, said his father had been fighting cancer since 1991 and was surrounded by friends and family members when he died.

"He went very peacefully — just stopped breathing," Forman said in an interview with The Associated Press.

A Chicago native who grew up in Mississippi, Forman was a principal organizer of the 1963 March on



Activist James Forman, left, is presented an envelope by Charles Lerrigo during services at the United Methodist Church in New York's Greenwich Village in this July 6, 1969 file photo. The congregation donated \$15,000 to Forman's organization. Forman, a civil rights pioneer, is credited with organizing the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Washington and the Freedom Rides in which blacks rode across the South to make sure buses were integrated as or-

dered by the courts.

In 1961, he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. (See Forman, Page 5)

Center

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A pictorial presentation highlighting the past, present and future of the arts center was featured with the help of local entertainer Lou Ragland.

Several local professionals, community activists, civic leaders, business owners and others received appreciation awards for their ongoing support of the WLVAC. Honorees included: Aurelia Mason, Helen Toland, Colette Lundy, Lillian Graham, TuWanda Locke, Sarann Knight-Pretty, Willie Daughtery, Alice Key, Helen Murphy, David Wallace, Chief Farore Akinlana, Dr. Paul Meacham, Akbar Gregory Shakir, Nadir Abdul Majied, Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt Davis and Sam Smith.

Toland — a community elder, mentor, educator, activist and the first female African-American principal

for the Clark County School District — spoke after receiving her award: "I'm really happy about being honored, and this is a reflection of the happiness that we've experienced working here at the arts center. I feel very gratified that the center provides something for our youth that is quite necessary, and it is a center of culture for many of us adults. My greatest pleasure comes from the warmth and caring that comes from being part of the arts center family. It's wonderful."

Key — a journalist, historian, arts performer and community activist — also spoke: "This arts center has done so much for our children; that's why I'm so impressed with it. Anything I can do to support the programs and Marcia Robinson, I am willing to do. I always remember that we were not born as a status, we were born to serve... This is an honor for us to be recog-

nized. This place has given us [someplace to fellowship and come together for those] who want to serve the community and who care about what happens to our children. The cultural advantages that this place offers to our children are unbelievable. They've put on some great shows and the staff is to be commended on the hard work that they accomplish each and every day."

Meacham — a mentor, jazz enthusiast, educator and administrator — was last to speak: "It's always a great honor to be associated with anything here at the arts center... it's one of the crown jewels [of the city]. It's a magnificent resource that, unfortunately, a lot of people don't know about, but it's a real positive thing in the lives of the young people on the (historic) West Side. It's my hope that this place continues to grow..."

"As a member of the Jazz Society, we initiate a Black History program every year for the kids in the neighborhood schools to introduce them to America's only original art form of music, jazz. It fills my heart with pride every time I pass by this building, because this is a place where positive things are going on and we need more of that for our children and this community..."

A reception was held to close out the event and further thank the volunteers for their efforts, support and dedication to the arts center over the last decade.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Les Pierre Streeter

Clark County School educator Michael Maxwell expresses his memories of the West Las Vegas Cultural Arts Center over the last 10 years during Saturday's program.

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