

# Publisher hero of civil rights

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Charles Tisdale, publisher of the legendary *Jackson Advocate*, often called "the most firebombed newspaper in America," has died.

Known for his vehement civil rights advocacy, both on paper, verbally and in street protests, Tisdale succumbed after collapsing last week while on a routine dialysis treatment. He was 80.

"He was civil rights twenty-four, seven," said his wife of 23 years, Alice Thomas-Tisdale, associate editor of the paper. She will now assume his former role as publisher.

"It didn't matter if we were having dinner or if there was a little old lady being mistreated in the grocery line," she said in an interview with the NNPA News Service.

"He sat at the table of kings, but he was always with those who were the less fortunate." The funeral will be held on Saturday, July 14, at 5 p.m. at Jackson State University's Rose E. McCoy Auditorium. Viewing will be held in the auditorium on Fri-

day, July 13, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and again on Saturday morning from 8 a.m. until noon.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Bennie G. Thompson from Mississippi released the following statement: "I have lost a good friend. I will miss Charles Tisdale, not only because of his tireless efforts on behalf of African-Americans for civil and equal rights, but also for his commitment to keep the African-American community informed," he said.

"I will always remember Charles Tisdale as a man of extraordinary courage, who cared deeply about the struggles of African-Americans fighting for justice."

Benjamin Todd Jealous, former executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, will give the eulogy.

"Mr. Tisdale lived his life with fearless devotion to telling the truth and defending the defenseless," said Jealous. "I am proud to have had him as a teacher and friend. I will miss him dearly."

A former managing editor for the *Advocate*, Jealous worked at the paper as a re-

porter and editor from 1994 to 1996. He is now president of the Rosenberg Foundation in San Francisco.

The *Advocate*, in existence since 1938, was purchased by Tisdale in the 1970s. It is a member of NNPA, a federation of more than 200 Black-owned newspapers.

NNPA Chairman John Smith, publisher of the *Atlanta Inquirer* said, "The Black Press of America has lost another champion for Human Rights. The Passing of Charles Tisdale, publisher of Mississippi's *Jackson Advocate*, marks an era of dynamic leadership for he was an advocate for the good of our beloved community who served as a steward and champion for the common good."

A graduate of Lemoyne College in Memphis, "Mr. T," as he was fondly called, moved to Chicago in 1950. There, he worked for the *Chicago Defender*. "I met [author] Richard Wright in Chicago when he was giving a lecture around 1951. ...We just talked about writing. ...My friends and I made a pledge that we would make

our living from writing. I was discussing that aspect with Richard Wright. The advice Richard gave us was 'stick to your craft,'" recalls Tisdale in his own historical tribute published in the *Advocate* last year.

He not only stuck to his craft, but to his passion — civil rights. He received death threats because of some of his stances on Mississippi, considered the poorest state in the nation. His newspaper was firebombed at least twice, most recently in 1998 when someone poured gasoline inside the building and threw Molotov cocktails through windows.

In the 2006 interview, Tisdale tells the story of the attacks, which started in the early 1980s:

"The *Jackson Advocate* ...The building is still over there. The Klan machine-gunned it down. They didn't like what I had to say," he chuckles. "My association with Farrakhan didn't please them either. Right after they machine gunned my office, Farrakhan sent a group from The Nation of Islam — I think it was a security group (See Tisdale, Page 5)

# Firefighter wins her settlement

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A jury awarded \$6.2 million to a firefighter who said she was harassed by colleagues because she is Black and a lesbian, harassment she says included someone mixing urine with her mouthwash.

Brenda Lee's lawsuit against the Los Angeles Fire Department also claimed her superiors made derogatory comments about her and forced her to perform strenuous exercises without proper safety precautions because of her race and sexual orientation.

The recent jury payout was the largest in a string of recent settlements of cases alleging discrimination and retaliation against women and minorities within the Fire Department. Judge Michael L. Stern ordered the panel back to court late last week for a second phase of the trial involving possible punitive damages against Lee's former supervisor, Capt. Christopher Hare.

Rob Kitson, Lee's attorney, declined to comment on the case because it was ongoing.

A spokesman for the city attorney's office, Jonathan Diamond, said the city would "review its options going forward."

Two other firefighters in the discrimination lawsuit already have won jury awards after their cases were tried separately. In April, a jury awarded \$1.7 million to Lewis Bressler, who claimed he was forced to retire for backing Lee in her claims of discrimination. Firefighter Gary Mellinger, who alleged the department retaliated against him after he helped Lee, settled with the city for \$350,000 after a jury found in his favor.

Councilman Jack Weiss said the verdict was "very alarming to anyone who has a fiduciary responsibility over the city budget. The most important thing is to reform the Fire Department," he said. "There's new leadership," Weiss added, "Hopefully that will prevent these sorts of lawsuits."

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