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Paul Davis' impact continues to serve in many ways

Noted in Passing by Guy Rhodes Editor/Publisher 9 hrs ago



The late Paul Davis, who owned The Tuskegee News before his death in 2012, was inducted into the Alabama Newspaper Hall of Honor on Saturday, April 7 at Auburn University, along with famous storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham. Members of the Davis family posed for group picture. Among those pictured are: Gayle Davis, Tuskegee News' owner and the widow of Paul Davis, and children Alan, Chris and Susan, along with grandchildren and great grandchildren. At the back right is Scott Richardson, assistant to the Tuskegee News Publisher, Guy Rhodes. For more details, see Guy Rhodes' column on Page 4 of today's edition of The Tuskegee News.

Former Tuskegee News' owner Paul Davis passed away in 2012 at the age of 74, but he is still being recognized for what he accomplished in nearly 50 years as a journalist.

On Saturday, April 7, Davis was installed into the Alabama Newspaper Hall of Honor during a ceremony in the Reading Room of Auburn University's Ralph Draughon Library.

While called a Reading Room, the site is actually a place that recognizes the history of journalism in Alabama. Plaques of honorees in the Hall of Honor established by the Alabama Press Association dating back to 1959 are on display.

Archives of back issues of most every newspaper in the state are available, as are the latest issues from today's newspapers.

It is a room in which Paul Davis joins a cadre of journalists who have contributed to the betterment of Alabama and elsewhere. Each honoree has his or her unique story, while at the same time sharing qualities of others in the industry.

Ironically, Kathryn Tucker Windham was inducted at the same time as Davis. Most remember Windham as a teller of ghost stories with her famous book *13 Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey*. But she was also a pioneering journalist who crossed paths with Davis when they both resided in Selma.

Davis was editor of the Selma Times-Journal in the 1970s before coming to Auburn and purchasing the Auburn Bulletin and Tuskegee News from Neil O. Davis, also a Hall of Honor honoree.

Paul Davis was passionate about exposing the truth and being a watchdog of public officials. His work as an editor with the Tuscaloosa News led to cleaning up deplorable conditions at the State's mental institutions. He was twice nominated for the Pulitzer Prize and won numerous awards through the years.

He served as president of the Alabama Press Association, stood in the school house door at the University of Alabama in 1963 while covering George Wallace's attempt to block black students from enrolling at the University and joined other journalists in interviewing Fidel Castro in Cuba when very little access was given to reporters from the non-communist countries.

Paul Davis loved doing things for his community. He started the Food Bank of East Alabama that still helps serve Macon County. Perhaps his greatest joy was playing Santa Claus in the Annual Auburn Christmas Parade.

He helped make The Tuskegee News an award-winning newspaper and made sure it had an impact on the community — no matter if it meant stepping on toes of those who didn't want their toes stepped on.

A little known-fact was that he wrote Bob Riley's Christmas messages to the State when Riley served as Alabama's governor. They got cross-ways when Davis resigned from State of Alabama Mental Health Board for conducting secret meetings. Riley promised that the board wouldn't meet in secret again before Davis agreed to rejoin that board.

Paul Davis taught me many things — the most important being the obligation to be loyal to the readers of The Tuskegee News to provide them a quality newspaper each and every week.

Guy Rhodes is editor and publisher of The Tuskegee News. He is a former recipient of the Distinguished Alabama Community Journalist Award and multi-time winner in the Alabama Press Association contest for Best Editorial Column or Commentary. He can be reached by email at guynrhodes@bellsouth.net