

MINNESOTA Spokesman-Recorder

AS IT WAS SPOKEN . . . LET US RECORD .

Editorial

New Northside agenda: 500 families, 10,000 scholars, five principles

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Harry Davis made me. He gave me the opportunities that led to my service at Phyllis Wheatley and the W. Harry Davis Leadership Foundation, and ultimately it was his call that landed me at Summit Academy OIC. He was the second person I called (after my wife) when I was considering a run for the Minneapolis School Board. Finally, he swore me in once I was elected. But, I am not special. I'm just one of hundreds of people that he touched.

Mr. Davis was a bridge-builder. He had the capacity to touch the business community, elected officials, and community leaders. Harry could always find a way to work it out. During my 17 years in North Minneapolis, I have met people from all walks of life who knew and respected him. He touched the tough guys and taught them to box. He touched the CEOs and taught them to care. And, he touched people like me and taught us to get in there and mix it up.

It is ironic that on the eve of the bridge-builder's death, a scene unfolded between elected officials and community leaders in North Minneapolis that demonstrated how bad things have gotten. In the absence of leadership, confusion reigns and resentment builds. Certainly, if the builder had looked over his shoulder as he made his final trip across the bridge of life, he would have been saddened by the scene. Gone was the collaborative spirit of communications and mutual risk-taking, powered by a common vision.

How then do we go forward? First, the streets must be safe. Period. But, let's take that one step further and assume that the police can arrest all of the criminals in North Minneapolis. The people who live there will then be free of the criminal threat and still free to live in the poverty caused by poor education and unemployment. Picture this: a Northside agenda that focuses on helping 500 families in North Minneapolis move from an average wage of \$6,200 to \$62,000 over the next five years. The effect would be to increase their gross earnings from \$3.2 million to \$32 million. Some have suggested that we should be even bolder and shoot for 2,000 families with a net growth target of \$128 million. I concur.

How would we do it? First by training and placing people in high-growth industries such as construction and health care. We should also look at the opportunities provided by such projects as the Target expansion to Brooklyn Park and the relocation of Coloplast to North Minneapolis. Further, let's tap into the proven track records of Teresa Carr and Mike Tomale to create small businesses. These people get it done without going around in circles. Finally, let us not forget the economic engine provided by the new Twins stadium. Given that it will be built on a highly regressive sales tax that the poor people of North Minneapolis will have to pay whether they ever see a game or not, we must give up debates about clinics and focus on ensuring that the people of North Minneapolis help to build and run the new facility that will be built on their doorsteps.

The second element of the North Minneapolis agenda is the focus on re-establishing the belief that all African Americans value education. The 10,000 scholars campaign will highlight the achievement of children who are typically painted as academic losers while focusing on providing them with the fundamentals of a good education. Doing well in school is not "acting White" or "selling out"—it is the road out of poverty and the gateway to prosperity. And, today there are opportunities ranging from the University of Minnesota's \$22 million initiative to the Minneapolis Community and Technical College's "Power of You." One could argue that these are multi-million-dollar investments that we cannot afford to leave on the table.

The third element of the agenda focuses on the core values of our community. Bill Cosby is right: Something is wrong. The 69 percent out-of-wedlock birthrate in the African American community is unacceptable. Yet, we refuse to take it on or talk about it. I have already mentioned education as a value, and it must be coupled with financial education that changes us from spenders to investors. In the same spirit, we have to value our children and set a good example for them while protecting them from danger. Finally, the violence is unacceptable. It is at this point that I often tell White audiences and friends that while their children buy the disgusting music that glorifies violence, our children live it out. At some point, we have to have a blackout. We buy no videos, see no movies, and buy no CDs for one month—say, around Christmas. We can't tell them what to sing or promote, but we don't have to buy it. That's truly the "Power of You." Get the picture?

The last element of the Northside agenda is a tribute to W. Harry Davis and the contribution that he made to the education of the children of this community. Within one half-mile of his childhood home there are 18 educational institutions that range from Phyllis Wheatley's Mary T. Welcome Daycare Center and Summit Academy OIC to Mr. Davis' alma mater,

North High School. This amenity has been overlooked for too long. It is a place where thousands of people of all ages come on a daily basis to gain the knowledge needed to make the community good for all of us. And, just like "Eat Street," it deserves a position of pride in Minneapolis. This area should be designated as the W. Harry Davis Educational Corridor, the gateway to North Minneapolis.

Some of us are already organizing to make this dream a reality. We are educators, clergy, business owners, elected officials and retirees. Some of us are Christian, others are Muslim. Some are White, others are African American. Some live in Minneapolis, others of us live in the suburbs. Despite these differences, we are all the same in the belief that we can make a difference for 500 families and 10,000 children. Please join us.