

Lawyer of the Year Greg Davis says award was result of team effort

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

Gregory Davis is happy about his selection as Lawyer of the Year by the North Carolina Association of Black Lawyers, but he said he realizes it probably has a lot to do with his work in defending Michael Hayes.

"I think that a large part of my receiving this award from the organization has to do with the Michael Hayes case," said Mr. Davis. "I cannot accept full credit for that. Michael Grace and I worked together on the case. When I accepted the award at the banquet, I told them that I also was accepting it on behalf of myself and Mike."

Mr. Davis, who has practiced law for 12 years, feels that his work on the Hayes case was significant for a number of reasons. At one level, he said, the successful defense shows that Afro-American lawyers are capable of defending criminal cases as well as any other lawyers. Both attorneys were court appointed to defend Mr. Hayes in the case.

Many in the community were shocked and angered by the outcome of the Hayes case. Mr. Davis said that

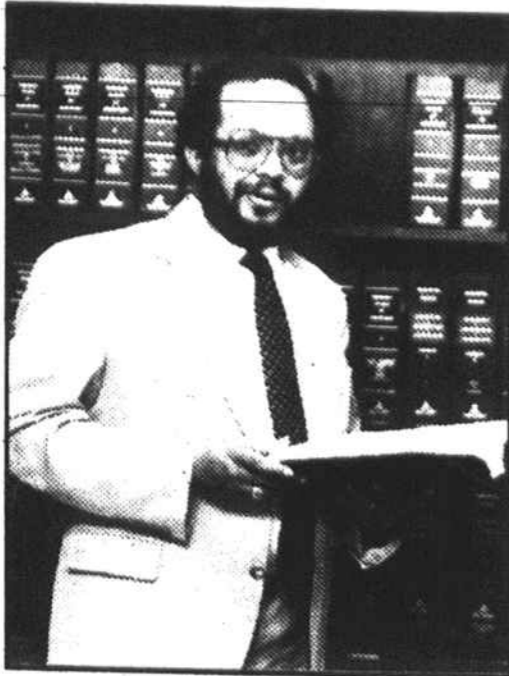


Photo by Mike Cunningham

Greg Davis

he had expected some of that reaction but he admitted, too, that he never thought it would escalate to the point that it has. Some community members have been campaigning to have the "not guilty by insanity" defense removed from the courts. While he is aware of the controversy surrounding the case, Mr. Davis said that any lawyer's first obligation is the defense of his client. It is the jury's responsibility to make a judgment, not the attorney's, he said.

"There was some reaction after the case. I thought it would have died down, but it has lingered on," said Mr. Davis. "The case was one of the highlights of my career. It's the type of case you dream of if you defend criminal cases. It was a very emotional issue. But if you're going to be a criminal lawyer, you have to be able to put your personal feelings aside for the interest of your clients. And that's not to say that I had bad feelings about Michael Hayes. Other than the fact that he killed some people, he was a nice guy. It's not my job to judge my client. It's just my responsibility to defend him. The jury will judge him."

Mr. Davis, who moved to Winston-Salem from his native Sanford, received his award during the association's annual meeting at Myrtle Beach. He received his undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and earned his law degree at North Carolina Central University. Mr. Davis said that although things are different for him now, law was not always his first love. He had in mind becoming an inventor of some sorts. But when those plans fell through, he figured he might as well give law

school a shot.

Now, Mr. Davis said, he is fascinated by his profession. His career provides him with the challenge of diverse conditions and the satisfaction of being able to help his clients.

"Each case presents a different challenge. It's not a situation where you become stagnant," he said.

Still, he admits, there are disappointments, such as the way in which

Afro-American lawyers are perceived in their own communities.

"The biggest problem I or any black lawyer has is with our own people and getting them to accept a black lawyer as being as competent as a white lawyer," said Mr. Davis, noting that about 50 percent of his clients are white. "Things are changing gradually. The feeling was that if you went to a white man's court, you'd better have a

white lawyer to get you off. That's one of the things that the Hayes case showed. Here was Hayes, a white man, being successfully defended by two black lawyers. And Judge (James) Beatty did an incredible job of controlling the courtroom and handling that case at the trial. He was just very good."

Mr. Davis and his wife have three daughters.

City challenged on pacts

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That criticism recently resurfaced with the upcoming August 28 opening of the new coliseum, which is expected to host receptions and other special events requiring catering services, and the acquisition of Convention Caterers by Fine Host of Greenwich, Conn. The later company purchased all Convention Caterers' outstanding stock and assumed direction and operation of that corporation.

Because of that transaction and in order to achieve the highest operating efficiency, Convention Caterers asked the city to assign the contract to Fine Host Corporation, which agreed to assume obligations under the contract in accordance with the terms and conditions of the existing document.

Mr. Fredericks, who oversees catering operations for the convention center and coliseum, recommended that the board approve Convention Caterers' request because "...it would be in the best interest of the city to deal directly with the corporation that controls the management and performance of the catering contract. In addition, the Fine Host Corporation possesses greater financial strength and thereby affording the city better protection from liability situations."

While some aldermen questioned the time length of the contract, the board unanimously approved assigning it to Fine Host for the remaining four years.

William G. Enloe Jr., chair of the M/WBE committee, also asked Mr. Fredericks why the contract had to be for five years.

"The prior contract with Convention Caterers was a basic year-to-year contract and was not satisfactory to them," Mr. Fredericks explained. "We increased it to a long-term contract because we felt Convention Caterers has proven themselves as an excellent catering company with quality and consistency in their food and reasonable prices. We felt very confident in extending to a five-year contract."

He said he was aware that some felt that the city had locked itself in and others out of a catering contract. However, he said, "Under the contract approved June 20, 1988, the Convention Center director may permit a guest caterer to provide catering services to patrons of the Convention Center with the consent of Convention Caterers or upon determining that Convention Caterers cannot satisfy the patron as to menu, service, price or otherwise."

A guest caterer providing service in the Convention Center must execute a "Guest Caterer's Contract" with the city, be licensed by the state, hold a Grade A health rating, maintain workers' compensation and employer's liability insurance of not less than \$100,000, maintain comprehensive liability insurance with minimum limits of \$500,000 each occurrence and agree to indemnify and hold the city harmless against all claims arising because of the conduct of caterer's management or any other act or negligence.

Committee member Marie Roseboro asked Mr. Fredericks why Afro-Americans and women had not been given the opportunity to bid for the contract.

He said that only Paul Myers Catering held a contract before Convention Caterers, but said when the present contract expired, in 1992 the city could conduct open bidding for the catering services, a \$1.8 million operation.

"Would you consider including yourself in some kind of thing to try to include minorities in the contract bidding," Mrs. Roseboro asked.

"I don't know what I'm going to be doing five years from now, I don't know if I'll be working for the city," Mr. Fredericks answered.

Because of the magnitude of the convention catering operation and because larger, national companies would participate in an open bid, minorities and other small businesses may be more successful if they bid for receptions and other events that will be sponsored by private groups in the hospitality room of the new coliseum, Mr. Fredericks said.

"If we wanted to make sure women and blacks had the opportunity to make a bid, couldn't we restrict the number of big companies from coming in?" asked James Mack, vice chair of the committee.

"Yes, couldn't we invite five or six companies in to bid on the project, set up our own criteria?" Mrs. Roseboro asked.

With the issue unresolved, Mr. Mack asked if M/WBE firms would be given an opportunity to cater food in the "boxes" -- private viewing suites -- set aside for special groups, in the new coliseum.

Mr. Fredericks and Mike Solomon, convention center/coliseum director, said the city works those concession stands and added there is not sufficient

space for a caterer to cook and serve special order meals that a group sitting in a private viewing suite might request.

"It seems to me that this is a golden opportunity for the city to give that business to the private sector, and it's a good opportunity for us to set that aside and negotiate and at least give it some thought," Mr. Mack said.

After about 15 minutes of discussion Mr. Mack admitted that the committee had waited too late to discuss a change in the way the concession stands in the new coliseum will operate, but said he and fellow committee members were just following through on their mandate from the city to factor M/WBEs into every facet of city business.

The new coliseum's concession stands will provide new jobs for minorities, Mr. Fredericks said.

"We're talking about minority ownership in that building and not those low-paying jobs at the concession stands," Mr. Mack responded. "We're talking about minority owners giving out some of those jobs. We're talking about carrying out the wishes of the Board of Aldermen manifested in the formation of this committee."

The committee asked Mr. Fredericks to go back to the drawing board and review all the possible ways that the city can provide opportunities for M/WBE firms to do business in the new coliseum. One of those ways included some possible M/WBE catering for the guests in the private viewing suites, with the city acting as chief caterer. Officials at Wake Forest University paid for the 18 special viewing boxes to be built in the new coliseum and it leases them out to corporations and groups. The city, as concession operator, also is in charge of supplying special foods requested by customers in the viewing suites, Mr. Fredericks said.

Four new members joined the M/WBE Advisory Committee Tuesday. They are Pat Antoni, owner of PIP printing; Bill Dowe, director of the N.C. Small Business and Technology Department Center on the campus of Winston-Salem State University; Gary Kersey, a vice president with Wachovia Bank & Trust; and Attorney Beverly Mitchell. Other committee members are James "Chico" Carter and Clay Ring. Four of the committee's nine members are Afro-Americans.

Patterson Ave. bank donated

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the community," Mr. Stuart said.

Frequent robberies of the branch and a decline in the amount of business conducted there in recent years led to the decision to close the office, Mr. Tidwell said. The 36-year-old branch has been robbed three times this year and eight times since 1980. There are three other Wachovia offices located less than 2 miles away, Mr. Tidwell said.

Vivian H. Burke, alderman of the Northeast Ward in which the proposed neighborhood center will be located, said she is excited about the new facility. "This says to me that Wachovia has a genuine concern for the citizens who have been their friends and cus-

tomers for all these years," Mrs. Burke said. "Not only will this neighborhood center be an asset to the citizens in my ward but to those to the north, west and south of here."

Mr. Stuart said plans for the building include using it as a site that would offer information about jobs, training and other government-sponsored programs and services. The drive-thru window would be perfect for city residents to make utility payments, he said. The building also would be "an available meeting place for community groups and a place where various governmental agencies could provide services.

In closing the north office branch,

Wachovia wanted the building to be used in a way that would contribute to the enhancement of the surrounding neighborhood, Mr. Tidwell said.

"We feel that the city's plan to bring services and information closer to the people who live in the North Patterson area meets that goal," he said.

The building has three floors and 4,780 square feet of space. Wachovia also is donating the furnishings, Mr. Tidwell said.

After the city formally accepts the building donation and proposal, Mr. Stuart said, converting the building into a neighborhood center would take about three months.

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