

BLACK HISTORY

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Black History: Leaders give back

Throughout the month of February people across the country will be celebrating the lives and legacies of great African-Americans who made contributions to society.

David Cooper - over 40 years in real estate and still going strong

BY JUDIE HOLCOMB-PACK
THE CHRONICLE

It's a good thing that David Cooper didn't listen to the naysayers when he decided to start a real estate business.

In 1975 he was told, "The economy is bad," "interest rates are too high," "it's too risky to go into real estate." Cooper decided the time was right for him - if he could make it in bad times, he could make it when the good times came.

Cooper grew up on a farm in Hemingway, South Carolina, where he learned the value of hard work and a strong work ethic. He came to Winston-Salem to attend Winston-Salem State University and after graduation, worked in the airlines industry. The job was good, but after 14 years it had become routine. He was bored. He wanted a new challenge. During a visit with his brother who lived in California, Cooper mentioned that he was looking for something else to do and his brother, who was in real estate, suggested that he consider real estate. Cooper was looking for an opportunity to connect with people on a more personal level and this seemed like the perfect fit.

Cooper earned his real estate brokers license in 1975 and worked briefly for another company before striking out on his own. In 1977 he became the first African-American in the Winston-Salem Regional Association of Realtors®. Cooper remembers buying his first house and having no one to help him through the hurdles of getting a mortgage. He knew he wanted to help others buy their first homes and to guide them through the process of one of the most important decisions a person will ever make.

Over 40 years later, Cooper Realty is still going strong. Cooper says, "I've never had a bad year, even during housing slumps." During recessions, he maintained his business on a conservative basis and planned for downturns by



David Cooper (on right), recipient of the Winston-Salem Assn. of Realtors Hall of Fame award in 2013, with his wife Ernestine Cooper and son Alton Cooper.

investing in rental properties and partnering with Fannie Mae, the Federal National Mortgage Association.

Cooper doesn't pay much attention to negative news and says, "When things got rough, I just worked harder." Based on company size, Cooper Realty has been the number one seller for several years, averaging about 100 houses sold a year. Cooper says, "... just be honest with folks and do the right things, you'll succeed."

Cooper Realty is a family business, which includes his wife Ernestine, son Alton, and brother Sam. Cooper gives credit for his success, "first to Creator God be the glory," and to his wife, who he calls his "silent partner." Cooper said,

"My desire is to work with people and help people be homeowners, especially first-time buyers." His proudest moments are when someone tells him, "I just paid off my house." He is now selling homes to the children - and grandchildren - of people he first sold a home to when he was starting out.

Cooper has seen a lot of changes in the industry since he began over 40 years ago. He remembers the days of MLS (Multiple Listing Service) books where you had to wait for paper updates, so you were always behind on new listings. With today's technology, new listings are immediate and accessible through his phone. "I can show a house and if they ask if there is anything else available in

that neighborhood, I can immediately pull up every listing there, by price or size," he commented. He added concerning technology, "Unless you move with it, you will be left behind."

Cooper also stressed that today's homebuyer is different from when he started out. They are more educated and shop smarter. They are more apt to use technology to search for a home. Cooper said he has sold homes to people he has never met and who never personally saw the home until after they purchased it. It was all done over the Internet.

Although he loves what he does, he still finds time for his hobbies: traveling,

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Davenport pays it forward

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Throughout Black History Month, The Chronicle will be highlighting history makers from right here in our community who are making a difference and setting an example for others to follow.

This week we shine our light on John Davenport Jr., founder and owner of

DAVENPORT, an engineering, design, and consulting firm located right here in Winston-Salem.

Growing up Davenport's father would regularly take him to construction sites where he became fascinated with designing and building. Although Davenport fell in love with construction at a young age, he had no idea those visits to construction sites around town would lead him to where he is today.

After graduating from East Forsyth, Davenport's love for construction and design led him to continue his education at N.C. State University. After undergrad, Davenport went on to attend N.C. A&T State University where he received his master's in engineering. In 2002 Davenport went out on a limb and decided to open his own engineering firm.



John Davenport Jr.

While speaking with The Chronicle last week, Davenport said he never imagined his company would take off the way it did.

"When I first started, I was just trying to survive."

laughed Davenport. "So to be where we are today with over 70 employees, that wasn't my original thought."

From humble beginnings in 2002 with less than five employees, today

DAVENPORT is a leading engineering and design firm with clients throughout the Southeast, with certifications in North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, and Florida. DAVENPORT has also worked on a number of projects here in the City of Arts and Innovation, including; the Benton Convention Center, Winston-Salem State University's north parking lot, and Simon G. Atkins High School to name a few.

Despite all his success, Davenport always finds ways to give back to the community that gave him his start. Aside from his father taking him to construction sites, Davenport also credits Addie Hines and the Upward Bound program at Winston-Salem State University for intro-

ducing him to the world of engineering.

"I went through that program and she was instrumental in helping me get in the position to go to college and go far," continued Davenport. "Upward Bound prepared me and helped me understand what that looked like."

Since 2007, Davenport has held a summer camp where children from local high schools and the Winston-Salem Urban League have the opportunity to intern with his company. Davenport said giving back is one of his "core pillars."

"...Someone gave me an opportunity and quite honestly, when I was at that point in life I didn't even know how to get into corporate America. I didn't know what engineers did," he continued. "But now

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