



Mr. Donald Seymour Vest

April 5, 1930 - January 17, 2015

A Man of Action, His Inner Child Always Alive

Across his life Donald Seymour Vest, Sr. was a kaleidoscope of activity. Whatever role he had - husband, father, gymnast, recruiter, neighborhood organizer, publisher, community leader-you would find him not just actively involved - but constantly in Action. So much in action was he that "FLIP, FLIP, FLIP" is how his friend and colleague the late Luther Holt referred to him during their years together at the Considine Recreation Center, during Don's tenure as recreation coordinator for the City of Detroit.

Don's life of action began on April 5, 1930 in Ypsilanti, Michigan as the only child of Eugene and Vida Vest. As an only child, friendships were very important to Don, with some - like his relationship with Lawrence Perry and Howard Neely - lasting across a lifetime. Although there's no one around who can attest to it now, it's certain that when Don began his education in Ypsilanti, he was an active child. His education began at Roosevelt High, a K-12 private training school for Eastern Michigan College.

His grandfather, Arthur Carter was a central figure in his life and because of his influence, early on Don had the idea of being a farmer. When he began his matriculation at Michigan State College (now Michigan State University) in East Lansing his intent was to major in agriculture. But that just didn't quite

suit him (watching things grow was probably just not enough action!), so he completed his degree in Social Science.

While at Michigan State, he was very much in action, as a gymnast, the first African American gymnast in the Big Ten Conference, and cheerleader. And this is what caught the eye of Hilda Freeman. She saw him in action as a Michigan State cheerleader, never having before seen anyone with as much energy as Don. A freshman at Michigan State, Hilda finagled an introduction to Don, a senior, and a new phase of his life began. After meeting her, except when the gymnastics team was away, this man of action did not miss a day seeing his Hilda, and at Christmas her gift was his Kappa Alpha Psi pin.

An ROTC cadet, upon completing his Bachelor of Science in 1952, Don entered the U.S. Army, beginning his career at Fort Knox. He was later transferred to Fort Ord in California, and this man of action decided that he needed to further "seal the deal" with Hilda. Never actually proposing, he simply asked "what kind of ring would you like." So, on July 12, 1953 Don and Hilda were married at Fort Ord and four months later, Don was deployed to Seoul, Korea.

It was after Korea that their family life in Detroit began, their daughter Karen having been born while Don was away in Korea. Karen was followed by Donald Jr. and later, Carl. Don communicated discipline to his children in all he did, running a really tight ship at home. He used wit and wisdom to guide and correct them, and later his grandchildren.

- To the son who didn't quite like the accommodations in his dorm room: "All you need is a desk."
- To the granddaughter who seemed to mysteriously get a stomach ache if things didn't quite go

her way: "You've got more ailments than a bottle of Carter's Liver tablets has pills."

- To the son who as a young adult was having a bit of a difficulty launching out on his own:

"There are three people standing on this porch, and only two of us have keys."

Discipline, wit and wisdom in a sentence, that would follow the recipients across a life time. The individual successes of his children and grandchildren can in part be traced to these lessons.

Though disciplined, Don's inner child very much directed his engagement with his children. Often after a full day at work, he'd pile all the children (along with neighborhood kids) into the car and off to Belle Isle for swimming they'd go. A favorite game (when Hilda was away, of course) was Blooky Doc. Don would turn out all the lights in the house, with the children charged to find his hiding place. They all squealed deliriously when he emerged from his hiding place to scare them. Ever the adventurer, during the 1967 upheaval in Detroit, Don took his family to see the riots, rather than away from them.

His pride and engagement with his children never wavered. Give him 20 minutes and he would regale you with their exploits and accomplishments. Across the years, he traveled near and far to visit and support them no matter where they ventured - New York, California, Atlanta, Australia.

When Don and Hilda established their home in the Russell Woods neighborhood, he worked tirelessly to support the community, serving as president of the Russell Woods Association, and as a co-founder of the Russell Woods Broadstreet Parade. His community engagement moved beyond the neighborhood to involvement in and giving hands-on leadership to multiple community organizations and within his church, Plymouth United

Church of Christ as deacon and treasurer; Friends of the Detroit Public Library (president); Museum of African American History (president); Brazeal Dennard Chorale (president); and Arts League of Michigan/Carr Center (chairman emeritus).

Don's career saw him give service not only to the City of Detroit's Recreation Department, but also included serving as employment interviewer for the Michigan Employment Security Commission, Assistant District Director for the Boy Scouts of America, culminating with retirement after 25 years as corporate manager of college recruiting and placement at Ford Motor Company's World Headquarters.

Retirement years found Don as involved and active in the community as ever. His love of the arts - music, dance, theater-saw Don and Hilda as supporters and members of the audience in arts and cultural venues across the community. In 1985, he and Hilda purchased Broadside Press, with the goal of continuing preservation of the artistic integrity and creative freedom that had distinguished Broadside since its beginnings. They successfully revitalized Broadside, consolidating its inventory, re-establishing the distribution network and giving re-birth to Broadside Poet's Theatre. It was Don's vision and commitment to preserving African American literature that led in 2005 to the establishment of the African American Literature Special Collection of the Purdy-Kresge Library at Wayne State University.

His interest in honoring and preserving African American history also led him to become an active Civil War re-enactor in the 102nd Regiment Infantry U.S. Colored Troops. In doing so, he and Hilda traveled across the mid-west.

As the years began to take their toll, Don didn't let it stop his activity. After moving from Sturtevant to Lafayette Park, many mornings, you could see him walking to take the People Mover to get downtown to purchase the

newspaper. And sometimes the People Mover was just too slow, so he'd just walk home!

Because since 1953, it was not Don or Hilda, but always "Don and Hilda" or "Hilda and Don," Don spent his last months at home in the care of Hilda. Although mostly silent during these months, he would often use his few words to tell Hilda that he loved her. That's the Don Vest that we all knew, in love with his Hilda, in love with his family, and in love with life. On January 17, Don left his legacy of love, action and commitment as an example for us all.

*The family of the late Don Vest would prefer that in lieu of flowers, a donation in his name, be made to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, 315 East Warren Ave., Detroit, MI 48202

Cemetery Details

Elmwood Cemetery

1200 Elmwood Ave.
Detroit, MI 48207

Previous Events

Visitation

Friday, Jan. **23**. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

O. H. Pye, III Funeral Home
17600 Plymouth Road
Detroit, MI 48227
(313) 838-9770
info@pyefuneralhome.com

Family Hour

Saturday, Jan. **24**. 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
600 East Warren
Detroit, MI 48201

Funeral Service

Saturday, Jan. **24**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
600 East Warren
Detroit, MI 48201

Tribute Wall



“ *Mr. Donald Seymour Vest*

January 21, 2023 at 09:34 PM



“ *Don was instrumental in helping me get a job at Ford Motor. Which I had a career of 34.5 years of service. May Jehovah God be with the family and may your grief be cultivated with wonderful memories of a good man. M. Bady.*

Michele Bady - January 30, 2015 at 11:06 PM



“ *Kind loving happy man. He was good as gold. Don was a rare breed. He was a bright light. So committed to his family, community and his people. I am proud to have been in a small way a part of his life.*



elise - January 25, 2015 at 02:30 AM



“ *On behalf of the BROWN FAMILY we would like to send our heart felt sympathy and best wishes to the VEST FAMILY. Gone but not forgotten; Mr. Vest will always be remembered for his beautiful spirit and personality!*

**VIRLYN
SHERYL
BILLY
TRAY**

WILLIAM BROWN - January 24, 2015 at 11:30 PM

VG

“ *Hilda and family,
My deepest sympathy goes out to all of you. It is extremely hard to lose a loved one. God has him now and you are left with wonderful memories to be cherished. I will keep you in my prayers for great comfort from friends and acquaintances.
prayerfully,
virginia graham*

Virginia Graham, from GLAAQN - January 24, 2015 at 09:20 AM

VG

“ *Virginia Graham, From GLAAQN lit a candle
in memory of Mr. Donald Seymour Vest*



Virginia Graham, from GLAAQN - January 24, 2015 at 09:17 AM

AN

“ *I'm sorry to hear of your families loss. May you find comfort in knowing that soon by means of Gods Kingdom all sickness and death will be brought to an end, and replaced with happy healthy people. Isaiah 33:24, Isaiah 25:8*

Andrea - January 24, 2015 at 08:10 AM

FF

“ My deepest sympathy to the family of Don Vest. His passion, energy and contributions were immeasurable. Like so many of his Ford family members, I thank Don for his rich legacy and the bridges he built for us.

Felicia Fields

Felicia Fields - January 23, 2015 at 07:38 PM

DG

“ My Dear Hilda and Family...My family sends our thoughts and prayers to you on the loss of our precious friend, Don. He will be remembered as a kind, thoughtful, and gracious person. Always willing to give of himself. Don was my gateway in joining the Ford Motor Company Family, and adding him and many new friends, including you, to my life story. I am here for you Hilda. Thank you for sharing Don with us!!

Doris Godwin - January 23, 2015 at 03:32 PM

RC

“ I will always remember Don as a wonderful, caring person. He always had a smile on his face. He was a great support to me during our time together at Ford Motor Company. He will be missed. I will keep all of the family in my prayers. God bless.

Rosalind Cox

Rosalind Cox - January 23, 2015 at 11:04 AM

BH

“ During our careers with Ford, I had the privilege and pleasure with working with Don on several projects to help younger employees adjust to the industrial environment and advance their careers. The most special of these projects was our membership on "The Black Flying Faculty" when, during the 1960's and '70's a dozen of us, sponsored by the Educational Affairs Department, traveled to HBCU'S for open dialogues with administrators, faculty and students.

I remember Don as a perpetually positive, energetic and creative professional who instilled confidence in everyone in his presence. Though serious about his mission and his work, Don's keen sense of humor frequently deflated tense situations. He is friend and a jewel of a man we shall all miss.

To Hilda and the Vest Family, Rita and I share your grief and pray for your peace.

Bob Hart, Retired, 1987

Cincinnati

Bob Hart - January 23, 2015 at 04:46 AM

LR

“ Donald Vest was half of one of my all-time-favorite "dynamic duos": Don and Hilda. I remember their regular attendance at Dudley Randall's Broadside Poet's Theatre at the Alexander Crummell Center. In 1987, as new owners of Broadside Press, they published my first book of poetry. Years later they helped create a pathway for me and others to pursue a graduate degree in creative writing at Central Michigan University. While I did not pursue that option, I will always be grateful for having been included in their sphere of love and support over the years. My heart goes out to the family, especially Hilda ("Mama V"), Donald Jr., Aku, and Carl - I will be praying for your peace and comfort. Donald ("Papa V")'s twinkling eyes and exuberant spirit will always be remembered. Love, Leslie Reese

Leslie Reese - January 22, 2015 at 12:32 PM

JM

“ Jean Mounger lit a candle in memory of Mr. Donald Seymour Vest



Jean Mounger - January 22, 2015 at 01:15 AM

JM

Sincere sympathy to the Vest family from Hilda's quilting sister at GLAAQN.

Jean Mounger - January 22, 2015 at 01:21 AM

GO

“ *My memory of the broadside press poets coming to the Detroit public library to teach the youth how to write poetry is a memory to keep. Thank you for caring and sharing with children of Detroit. You will be missed. Rip. Mrs. Gail Orange, urban librarian*



Gail Orange - January 21, 2015 at 08:46 PM

AK

“ *4 files added to the album New Album Name*



Aku Kadogo - January 21, 2015 at 04:13 PM

GM

“ *Our deepest regrets to the family of Don Vest. Don was a true gentleman and a leader at Ford. He was friends to many and a person to cherish!*

Greg Mack and Family!

Gregory Mack - January 21, 2015 at 08:30 AM

DG

“ Dale Gray remembers Don as a sincere, caring, understanding professional: a faithful employee of Ford Motor Company and a true friend.
God rest his soul.

Dale Gray - January 20, 2015 at 09:47 AM

LI

“ Our hearts are full with both loss and hope for the passing of one of our great Detroiters. Sondai and Lindiwe Lester are hopeful that Don's life will give hope to the many aspiring writers to find and share their voice as he and Hilda did for decades. You will be missed our friend.

Lindiwe - January 19, 2015 at 11:01 PM

AW

“ Hilda, I am sorry for the loss of Don. My thoughts and prayers are with you and family during this difficult time. I knew Don for many years during our employment at Ford Motor Company, and he was helpful to me on numerous occasions. Don was a good man, for sure, made the world a better place, and he will be missed.

Art Williams

Art Williams - January 19, 2015 at 08:22 PM

JP

“ June Packer purchased the Fairest of All for the family of Mr. Donald Seymour Vest.



June Packer - January 19, 2015 at 08:14 PM