

Today's Voting Rights Activists Lunch With The Father of the Voting Rights Movement

When the Young Democrats, affiliated with the Alabama Democratic Conference, lunched with the Honorable Rufus A. Lewis, an historical promise was codified: "We will continue the Lewis' legacy by registering everybody we see and getting them to the polls to vote," said Maverick Roberts.

An organizational genius, Lewis with the support of others who had confidence in this leadership skills, made it possible for a generation (1945-65) of Black Montgomerians become registered voters. He was one of the co-founders of the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC) in

1960, and was instrumental in promulgating the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In 1976, President Jimmy Carter appointed him to serve as the first-ever Black Alabamian to serve as a U.S. Marshal.

The Young Democrats can be considered the great-great-grandchildren of Lewis in the Voting Rights Movement. Lewis, now 92 years old, spent more than 70 years of his life, fighting for 1st -class citizenship for all Alabamians and Americans.

"It was because of Lewis' undaunted motivation and encouragement that my grandparents became registered

and opened up their home as a 'citizenship school' in 1950," said TSTC Archivist Gwen Patton. "It is so fitting that these Young Democrats make this promise to Coach Lewis to continue his legacy."

"It's important for people to vote, especially young people," said Coach Lewis. "Their vote enmasse can have influence that will effect necessary changes in our country."

You can study the Hon. Rufus A. Lewis Special Collection at the archives in the H. Council Trenholm State Technical College Learning Resource Center, located on the Historical Voting Rights Trail.



Seated l-r Dr. Gwen Patton, Coach Lewis, Maverick Roberts, ADC State Coordinator Jerom Gray. Standing l-r: Ms. Deloris Gamble and Ms. Tamela Zeigler. Photo: TSTC Archives

-OVER-

Montgomery Advertiser

Lifestyle



Sunday

April 18, 1999

Elizabeth Via Brown **4G**

Weddings **5-6G**

Coffee Break **7G**

Civil rights activist honored at luncheon

Maverick Roberts, Tamela Zeigler, Deloris Gamble, Jerome Gray and Gwen Patton were among the people attending when members of the Young Democrats had lunch recently with Rufus Lewis. Now 92 years old, Lewis was one of the co-founders of the Alabama Democratic Conference and was instrumental in the affirmation of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

In thanking him for his involvement, the Young Democrats promised to carry on his legacy.



Special to the Advertiser

Eleanor Dawkins, right, the daughter of Rufus Lewis, and her daughter, Karen, listen to the reading of Lewis' letters.

Voting rights activist's letters tell story of hope, desire for equality

Rufus A. Lewis, who was known as the father of Montgomery's voting rights movement, corresponded with many other players in the movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Filled with encouragement and strategy for achieving the right to vote, his correspondence told a story of hope and his desire for blacks to be equal citizens in the community.

Among his papers are letters from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, W.C. Patton, and attorneys Arthur Shores and Ozell Billingsley.

This week, some of his correspondence was read to a whole new generation of blacks who now have voting rights as a result of Lewis' involvement, commitment and

knack for organizing. The program took place in the Library Tower of Learning at Trenholm State Technical College, which is located on the Historic Voting Rights Trail.

Among those gathered to hear the correspondence read by Adana Bennett, Lonnie Greene, Stinson Holmes and Gwen Patton, who are students and members of the faculty at the college, was Eleanor Dawkins, the daughter of Rufus Lewis. With her was her daughter, Karen Dawkins.

Some others attending were among the people who worked with Lewis in the 1950s, including Joe Dickerson, Idessa Redden, James Hall, Carrie Peavy, Andre Bolling, Pearl Gray Daniels and Johnnie Carr.



Special to the Advertiser

Lonnie Greene reads some of Lewis' letters in front of a portrait of the activist.