



Party members and supporters celebrate as Larry Little unveils the historical marker.

Photos by Layla Garms

Black Panthers' legacy honored with marker

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

When the Winston-Salem Chapter of the Black Panther Party was founded 43 years ago, the city was a very different place.

Party members who fought for better conditions, services and treatment for African Americans faced persecution, harassment and often, imprisonment, just for being associated with the organization.

Many of them could likely never have imagined that they would someday be honored, applauded and thanked for their service to the community. But that's just what happened Sunday, when the Forsyth County Historic Resources



Nelson Malloy speaks.

Commissioner unveiled a historic marker in honor of the Party's contributions before an enthusiastic

"Right on! All power to the people!" proclaimed Larry Little, a Winston-Salem State University professor and one of the local Party's most prominent members. "Brothers and sisters, we are so thankful for everybody being here on this occasion. We are indeed honored."

The marker, which stands at the corner of Fifth Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, not far from where the Party's first headquarters stood, pays homage to the many contributions the Panthers made to the community, including the free breakfast program for children and ambulance service that members started.

"The Black Panthers did great work in our community and deserve

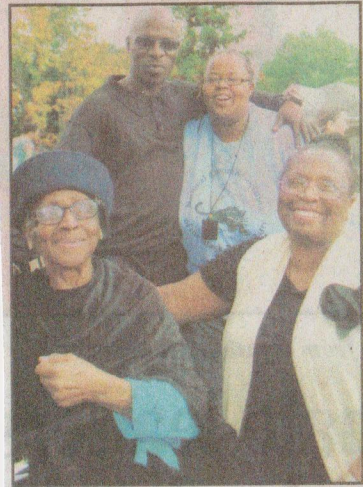


Panthers and supporters march across Martin Luther King Jr. Drive.

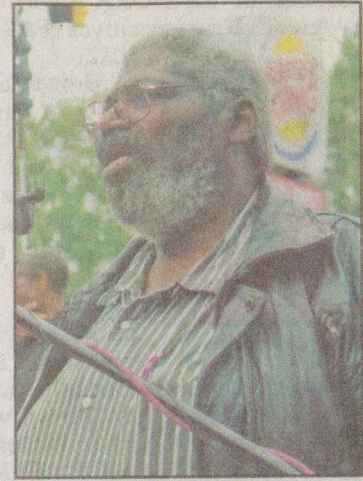
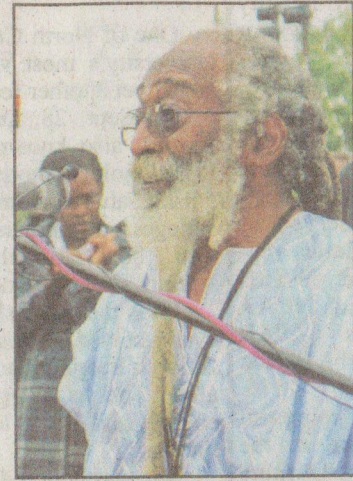
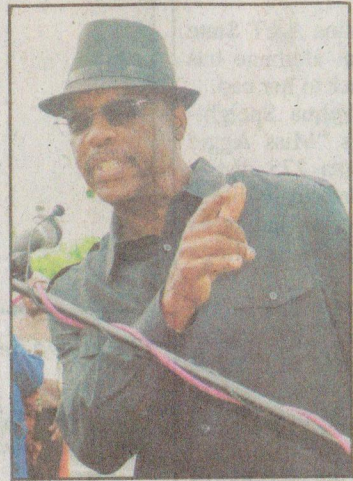


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Robert Greer, the original captain of the local Party, is surrounded by his family as he addresses the crowd.



Lee Faye Mack (front row, left), known as the "mother" of the local Black Panther Party, poses with her daughter, Panther Hazel Mack and grandchildren Malcolm Mack and Atiya Bey.



Panthers (from left) Larry Little, John Hayes and Julius Cornell address attendees.

Panthers

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the recognition and so today, we salute the Black Panthers," said City Council Member Derwin Montgomery, who led the charge to have the marker erected. "... They paved the way and left a tradition and a rich history and heritage that we continue today with this dedication."

The event began with a symbolic march from the site of the organization's original headquarters, a few blocks away from the marker. African drummers led the way for the marchers, who strode confidently across the intersection, their fists held high in the air. Marchers joined the healthy crowd that was already assembled around the marker to hear reflections from city leaders and some of the Party's original members.

Former City Council Member Nelson Malloy, who was among the Party's most active members, regaled the audience with tales of the Party's glory days. He remembers enjoying meals of chicken feet and rice and gravy prepared by a supporter and wielding a shotgun alongside fellow Party members to prevent a local woman from being wrongfully evicted. The situation was diffused before anyone got hurt, he said. Party members had to change their headquarters locations several times because of setbacks, such as the fire that ruined the first office - which some believe was started by a firebomb, Malloy said. On

another occasion, a meat truck was stolen and parked outside the headquarters, which Malloy says prompted local law enforcement to "shoot up" the place, and Party members were arrested constantly, for everything from trespassing to "excessive honking of the horn" which Party members did to signal children that breakfast had arrived, and other petty charges, many of which were often contrived, Party members say. Despite the setbacks, the organization survived, thanks to the support of community members who served as "the wind beneath our wings" by opening their homes, their kitchens and their hearts, among other things, to the organization in its heyday, Malloy said.

"We had a lot of support in

this community," he commented. "They many not have been a part of the Black Panther Party, but they played an integral role in the success of community."

Robert Greer, the original captain of the Winston-Salem chapter, spoke of the deep commitment the Party members themselves displayed.

"If you heard the speakers that we just had, you can understand the support that I had back then," Greer said. "...We had people who really, really understood what we were trying to do."

Many of the African American politicians on hand expressed their appreciation to the Panthers for helping to open doors for them. State Rep. Earline Parmon, the Democratic candidate for North Carolina Senate District 32, praised Party members for refusing to accept the status quo.

"They dared to stand up and say, 'We're fed up and we're not taking it anymore,'" she

declared. "...Because they had courage, today I stand as ... the first African American ever to represent Forsyth County in the state Senate. It didn't start in 2012; it started (with the Panthers' founding) 43 years ago. I'm grateful for this day and I'm grateful to all of you. Power to the people."

Attorney Hazel Mack, director of Legal Aid of North Carolina's Triad Region, said she and others who fought for the rights of African Americans through the Party are ready to pass the torch on to the next generation.

"Really, I want to talk to the young people," said Mack. "We were nothing but children. We were 16, 17, 18 years old, but, like many of you, we had a desire to see things be different than what they were. I want the young people to understand that that was our time and this is your time. There is nothing you see that cannot be changed. Whatever it is that you think you

can do to make yourself better, to make your community better, you can do it."

Other speakers in the roughly 90-minute program included Mayor Allen Joines, Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke, City Manager Lee Garrity, City Council members James Taylor and Dan Besse, County Commissioner Walter Marshall and Mark Maxwell, chair of the Historical Resources Commission.

The 46th anniversary of the national Party's formation will be celebrated in Winston Salem Oct. 25-27 during the Second Annual Board & Membership Meeting of the National Alumni Association of the Black Panther Party at Sundance Plaza Hotel. Robert "Bobby" Seale, who co-founded the national party alongside Huey Newton is slated to speak during the festivities, organizers say. For more information, text "BPP" to 336-575-4187.