

Minorities found ally, benefactor in Paxton

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Monday, April 03, 2006

Fred Paxton will be remembered for his warmth, sincerity and his sense of concern for all people, regardless of their skin color, said J.W. Cleary, president of the Paducah-McCracken County chapter of the NAACP.

Cleary said Sunday that he was greatly saddened by the death of Paxton, who was chairman of the board of Paxton Media Group, which owns The Paducah Sun and WPSD-TV.

“It’s going to be a terrible loss to the entire community, but I feel that his name is going to be around for a long time, especially in the African-American community,” Cleary said.

Cleary was just out of high school when he met Paxton. He and four other young men had formed the Paducah Brotherhood Association. Because of Paxton’s support, they made him an honorary member.

“The philosophy was we were just trying to make a difference in the community as far as giving African Americans some things to do,” Cleary said. “Mr. Paxton and The Paducah Sun followed us the whole way. Anytime we needed anything financially or support as far as advertising, Mr. Paxton was there to assist us. It meant so much to us, young as we were, to have that type of support.”

When the NAACP sought funding to build a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Paducah, Cleary mentioned to Paxton

that he was thinking of having workers from out of town come in to landscape the small park on Park Avenue and place the monument, then expected to cost \$4,000.

“Mr. Paxton changed my whole philosophy,” he said. “He said ‘Why do you want to send your money out of the community?’ ”

Then he promised to contribute the first \$2,000.

“He didn’t prejudice himself or only do for one segment of the community,” Cleary said.

When Paxton heard the Hotel Metropolitan was offered a \$250,000 grant for restoration but that it required a \$20,000 local match, Cleary didn’t even have to call for help, he said. Instead, he was in a grocery when Paxton called his cell phone and offered half the money needed, which Cleary said helped spur local fund-raising even more.

“His philosophy was with any community, if you work together, it’s unlimited how high we can go,” Cleary said.

But Cleary stressed that Paxton’s role was not solely as an adviser and financial backer. He was an avid supporter of the Oscar Cross Boys & Girls Club, and made a special effort to attend events to show his support in person.

When the NAACP began a campaign promoting diversity in the workplace, Paxton built minority recruiting into the performance reviews of department heads at both The Paducah Sun and WPSD.

“If he told you something, you could bank on it,” Cleary said. “It wasn’t like he would say something to you and say something different to someone else. When he brought you into his office to discuss a particular issue or situation, you felt the warmth from him, the sincerity. I think that’s what helped make a difference.”

On Jan. 9, Paxton and his wife, Peggy, created the \$1 million McCracken County Community Career Endowment through the Community Foundation of West Kentucky, designed to improve the lives of African Americans in western Kentucky.

Businessman B.A. Hamilton, a member of the endowment advisory committee, said, “The intended purpose is for us to be able to reach out into the community to find young people who we can encourage to make a better life for themselves to continue their education, and then those who are having trouble finding jobs, we could place them in a position to make a good livelihood.

“It’s definitely a legacy,” Hamilton said. “I think it will be remembered for a long time.”

Although no income has yet been received from the endowment, Cleary said, “It appears it’s opening other doors for us because when people found out that Fred and Peggy Paxton were behind it people said, ‘If they did it, I want to help, too.’”

Hamilton added that Paxton’s support has simply been invaluable through the years. “It made it easier for us to be able to push forward,” he said. “I think once you get someone with influence to partner with you and have the same kind of respect for the same idea, you can’t help but help that cause.”