

Smith, bus contractor, dies at 88

South county loses two longtime leaders

Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2009

By JESSE YEATMAN

The Enterprise
Staff writer

Guffrie M. Smith Sr., father of 17, died Oct. 25 at the age of 88.

Born June 1, 1921, Smith was known for his generosity to neighbors in the Scotland community where he lived most of his life. The patriarch of the large family encouraged his children to pursue education and always provided for them, some of his children said this week.

"All of us had a chance to go to college, to get some degree," said Guffrie Smith Jr., the first born of 17 children.

"He always had pushed education ... had high expectations from us," the son said.

One of his other sons, Orlando "Tubby" Smith, went on to become a men's collegiate basketball coach who won a national championship at the University of Kentucky in 1998 and is now head basketball coach at the University of Minnesota.

The youngest of seven, Guffrie Smith Sr. was raised by an uncle who instilled in him the significance of education.

Daughter Wendy Rice-Morton remembered the children putting their homework on the kitchen table each night for their father to review.

His wife, Parthenia Barnes Smith, did much of the child rearing. In addition to 17 children, the couple has 34 grandchildren and 31 great-grandchildren.

Smith became an early black entrepreneur in the southern end of St. Mary's County as one of the first owners of a trailer park, laundry and barber shop in the early 1970s that lasted 30 some years. The property was a former one-room schoolhouse, which Smith purchased and named after his mother-in-law, Martha Barnes.

He spent 48 years as a bus driver and bus contractor for St. Mary's public schools.

His son described him as a thrifty, staunch Republican who had a strong sense of business. "He believed in having his own business," Guffrie Smith Jr. said.

Rice-Morton said her father always provided for the family, and still found extra time and resources to give to those less fortunate or unable to provide for themselves.

"He was very knowledgeable," and in addition to raising vegetables and livestock for his family performed much of the work on his home and bus repairs, including learning how to do upholstery to fix bus seats.

Smith was a Buffalo Soldier during World War II and earned a Purple Heart following an ambush in the mountains of Italy that took 80 percent of his troops and wounded him.

"He promised himself and God if he made it back here he would do service for the community" and support his family, Rice-Morton said.

She said her father often gave chopped wood or extra vegetables from their fields to elderly neighbors when she was growing up.

He owned four buses, including two charter buses that he would use to shuttle people to county events for a quarter a ride, she said.

"He gave back to the community; that's what he wanted to do," she said.

Smith loved going fox hunting early Sunday mornings before going to St. Luke United Methodist Church, where he sang in the choir.

"He was a good singer, a tenor," Guffrie Smith Jr. said. "He was a very spiritual, Christian man who went out of his way to help everyone."

He was active with the St. Mary's County NAACP Chapter, Maryland Council of PTAs, 4-H, Disabled American Veterans, Purple Heart Association and Joseph Egan Masonic Lodge 104.

Among many other activities, he also served as an adviser to the county commissioners in the First District.

"They respected his opinion highly," his son Guffrie Smith Jr. said.

Smith lived his last nine years at Chesapeake Shores nursing and rehabilitation facility, where he was well-loved, according to Lisa Bowie, admissions and marketing director. He won a volunteer service award several years ago.

"He was one of the most prestigious nominees ever," Bowie said. "He was huge in the community."

Family will receive friends on Oct. 29 from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Scotland followed by a funeral service. Memorial contributions can be made to the Alzheimer's Association, Southern Maryland regional office.

jyeatman@somdnews.com