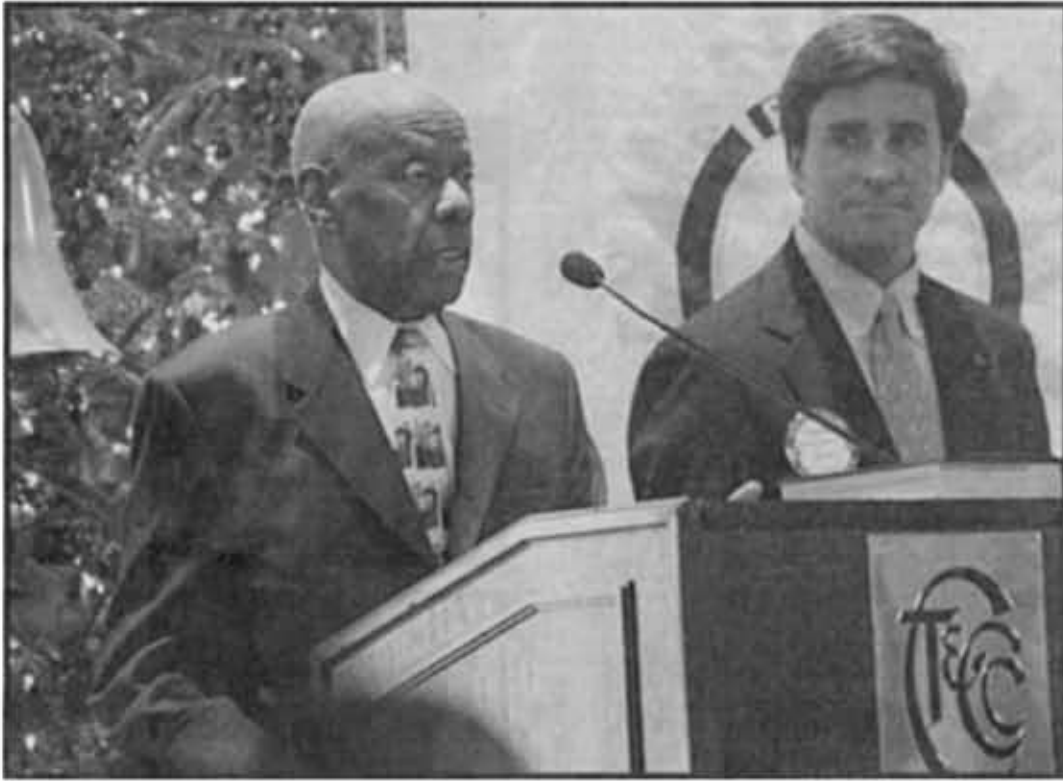


Community

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Neighbor Newspapers



Left, from left, Jesse Hill speaks at the Rotary Club of Buckhead annual luncheon after being awarded the Rev. Robert Ross Johnson Humanitarian Award by Charlie Crawford in Atlanta last week. Above, Sam Williams, president of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, speaks.

Photos by Muzel Chen/Staff

Rotary Club of Buckhead honors civil rights leader

By Everett Catts
Neighbor Newspapers News Editor

Sam Williams stepped to the podium to introduce Jesse Hill, a leader in Atlanta's civil rights movement.

Williams, president of the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, was pinch-hitting for former Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, who had to attend a Delta Air Lines event because he is on its board.

Hill and Williams have been friends for four decades. So when Hill was honored by Rotary Club of Buckhead as its Rev. Robert Ross Johnson Humanitarian Award recipient Dec. 4 at Cherokee Town & Country Club, Williams was glad to fill in for Young.

"Jesse Hill is my friend and Jesse Hill is my mentor," he said. "I first met him in 1967, when I was a student at Georgia Tech and an intern for [former Atlanta Mayor] Ivan Allen's office."

Hill added, "Sam could have talked about the time we were with Mr. [John] Portman. We've been there quietly [making an impact]."

Hill, 80, was a member of the board of directors for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta and served as president and CEO of the Atlanta Life Insurance Co. from 1973 to 1992.

HONOREES

Here is a list of the Rev. Robert Ross Johnson Humanitarian Award winners since the honor was established:

Year	Recipient
2000	Andrew Young
2001	Bill Bolling
2002	Dan Cathy
2003	Victor D. Pentz
2004	Paul Hewitt
2005	Hattie Dorsey
2006	Bernie Marcus
2007	Jesse Hill

He also was on the board of directors at the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Hill was the first African-American selected to serve on the board of regents for the University System of Georgia.

Williams cited the 1960s battle between Atlanta, New Orleans, La., and Birmingham, Ala., for which city would become the economic capital of the South. He added

Hill's peaceful efforts helped Atlanta win the battle during a time filled with violence across the South.

When Williams was asked to introduce Hill in Young's place, he called the former mayor.

"I talked to Andy and he said, 'Read my book [An Easy Burden]'. Thank God it's got an index," he said, thumbing through a copy. "Jesse helped Andy become the first black elected official in Atlanta."

Williams added Hill helped desegregate public schools and establish Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, MARTA and other Atlanta organizations.

"[Saving] Grady [Memorial] Hospital is one of the ideas Jesse asked us to tackle eight years ago," the chamber president said, referring to the organization's plan to hand Grady over to a nonprofit corporation supported by Atlanta businesses. Last month the hospital's board voted to turn Grady's control to a nonprofit.

The honor Hill received is named after the founding pastor of First Albans Congressional Church in Queens, N.Y., and a community leader in New York, Johnson, who moved to Atlanta in 1991, died in 2000 at 79.

"What we are trying to do is find someone who is deserving [of the award] and has the traits Rev. Bob had. [Hill's] contributions to the county have been great," club President Charlie Crawford said.

Following the meeting, Hill was asked about the honor.

"Actually one, this club and the award was named after that lady's father, for his contributions to the city and the club," he said, pointing to Michele Tompkins, who attended the meeting. "The Rotary clubs in Atlanta and all over the country were started for providing important leadership. If you look around the membership of the club, there are key businesspeople and professionals. That leadership is important to every community."



Above, Keanu Mitanga, 11, on violin, and sister Myrtil Mitanga, 12, on cello, children of Herrad Welp and Yamba-Yamba Mitanga of Atlanta, performs at the Rotary Club of Atlanta at the Cherokee Town Club in Atlanta last week.



Left, from left, Jesse Hill, Bruce Salzinger, and Charlie Crawford, show the Rev. Robert Ross Johnson Humanitarian Award at the Rotary Club of Buckhead annual luncheon in Atlanta last week. Above, Aadu Allpere, president-elect of the Rotary Club of Buckhead, speaks at the annual luncheon.