

# Richmond Confidential

## *'Local treasure' Fred Jackson honored by city*



Fred Jackson listens as Mayor Gayle McLaughlin reads a proclamation honoring his efforts in Richmond.

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Fred Jackson was willing to accept the award, but he let it be known that it wasn't his alone.

“Whatever I am, whatever I hope to be,” said Jackson, one of Richmond’s greatest community leaders. “I owe it to my family. You drove me.”

A Civil Rights leader, community organizer, peace advocate and longtime leader in the city’s historically impoverished North Richmond neighborhood, Jackson’s ode to family came as part of a ceremony honoring his life of service at Tuesday night’s City Council meeting.

Jackson was honored with a public proclamation for his “exemplary service to the community.”

The proclamation was part of the city’s ongoing observance of Black History Month. (Read the proclamation here: [20110215\\_proclamation](#)) Mayor Gayle McLaughlin delivered the nearly 600-word proclamation to Jackson, recounting his work in the deep South during the nonviolent struggle for Civil Rights and his numerous books, plays, songs and other artistic meditations on race, protest and community empowerment.

“Fred Jackson continually demonstrates his deep love of humanity across all races and ethnicities, which he endearingly refers to as ‘the human bouquet,’” McLaughlin said.

The proclamation came with an air of solemnity. The 73-year-old Jackson, for years a local fixture of stout build and a robust tuft of white hair and bushy white sideburns, was confined to a wheelchair Tuesday night.

Jackson is battling liver cancer, with which he was diagnosed last month. In recent weeks, the long-ubiquitous Jackson has become a rare sight in public.

His face and neck were noticeably slimmer Tuesday, but Jackson's voice and wit still resounded strong. Among the high points during a stirring address, delivered from his wheelchair, was Jackson's allusion to what he called his "hounds of conscience," which he said constantly prod him to do good works.

"If I see someone who is hungry, and I elect to pray for them first rather than feed them, you bite me, you hounds of conscience," Jackson said, nodding and tapping one foot for emphasis. "Now, I've been bitten many times," Jackson said, drawing laughs from the crowd of about 100 people.

Jackson has been a leader in Richmond, particularly the distinct neighborhoods of North Richmond, since he and his family migrated here from Mississippi in the 1950s.

In the 1960s, Jackson returned to the South to join the nonviolent protests there, participating in sit-ins at "whites only" lunch counters.

More recently, Jackson participated in a walk from San Pablo to Sacramento in protest of inequitable public school funding in 2004, also enduring a 19-day fast in order to draw attention to the issue.

He also served as a leading voice against the 2005 execution of Stanley "Tookie" Williams, who was convicted of murder but had grown into an acclaimed author and voice for peace while in prison.

Over the years, Jackson also produced a cache of plays, books, songs and other artistic works.

After McLaughlin handed him the framed proclamation, more than a dozen friends and community members spoke publicly in honor of Jackson.

Terrance Cheung, the chief of staff for County Supervisor John Gioia, read a tribute from Gioia that praised Jackson's grace and leadership and vowed to work with the city to rename North Richmond's biggest street in honor of Jackson.

Local leader Jackie Thompson called Jackson "a historian." Resident Ellen Gailing called Jackson a "soldier who cares about equality" and a "champion of Richmond."

A staff member representing Congressman George Miller (D – CA) promised that during an upcoming House session Miller would read into the Congressional record remarks honoring Jackson.

Last to speak was newly elected Councilman Corky Booze, who has worked alongside Jackson for years.

"When we talk about Black History, we talk about Fred Jackson," Booze said.

Jackson, sitting in his wheelchair, smiled and raised his right fist in approval.