

Longtime Richmond activist dies

[By Chris Treadway](#)

[Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: 09/08/2011 03:00:51 PM PDT

Wearing a medal given to him for his community activism by the Black Women for Political Action...



Fred Davis Jackson, who led a life dedicated to peace, equality and social justice and worked tirelessly to bring those ideals to some of the poorest areas of West Contra Costa, died Thursday morning at age 73.

The loss, which Jackson's many friends had been braced for since he was diagnosed with cancer last November, quickly reverberated around the city and as far away as Washington, D.C.

"We just lost one of the best citizens we've ever had in West County -- I think the country," said Congressman George Miller, who selected Jackson to go to Washington, D.C., in December 2008 to cast the 7th Congressional District electoral vote certifying the election of Barack Obama as president.

"Fred was the official person to lift our community spirit, to organize us to bring us together."

Jackson was part preacher, part social movement leader and part showman in his quest to bring a message of peace and equality to those who needed it most. Over the years he wrote a play, composed songs and most recently wrote a book, published earlier this year.

Seville recalled a city Arts and Humanities event where Jackson sang an original song "Died Too Young," dedicated to those who had succumbed to violence. "There wasn't a dry eye in the place," she said.

Jackson took great pride in describing himself as "a son of a sharecropper," born in 1938 on a cotton farm near Macomb, Miss.

Jackson was a teenager when he came to the Richmond area with his family and graduated from Richmond High School in 1957. Even back then, he recalled years later, he usually took on the

role of peacemaker.

Jackson, who earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from University of Phoenix, was a longtime manager for Pacific Telephone before retiring and beginning a second career as a full-time activist. He was chairman of the county's Economic Opportunity Council, served on the board of Richmond Main Street Initiative, and was a member of the city Arts and Culture Commission.

Since 1993 he had been the community resource coordinator for Neighborhood House of North Richmond, which allowed him to pursue efforts on a number of fronts, from trying to bring racial factions to common ground, to a role in affordable housing for seniors, to getting the community involved in a healthy nutrition initiative.

"My philosophy is 'people helping people, ' that's how it's done, " he said. "You can't do it alone. Those that help you up may have to catch you on the way down."

Generations of children knew Jackson best as Santa Claus, a role he played annually at Verde Elementary School, passing out gifts to children in impoverished North Richmond.

"I believe we are connected by a common thread, " Jackson said in an interview last November. "You've got to love everybody. We're still sisters and brothers in one family."

Jackson earned numerous accolades for his work over the years, and earlier this year the city and county renamed a street Fred Jackson Way in his honor to ensure his name and work are remembered.

"I want to thank (county) Supervisor John Gioia for naming that street after him, because he got to see it while he was here," said Richmond Councilman Corky Booze. "I was so honored to know Fred and work with him."

Funeral arrangements for Jackson are pending.