



Department of Civil Rights

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2022 Reverend Wright Award Recipient is Wayne Strong

The Annual Reverend Wright Human Rights Award goes this year to Wayne Strong (Posthumously). Unfortunately, Wayne passed away earlier this year. The award will be presented to Wayne's wife, Terri, at the Common Council meeting on Tuesday, September 20, 2022.

Wayne was passionate about all forms of justice. He knew that young African American men needed positive role models and activities to succeed in spite of the racism and barriers that they experienced. Thirty years ago, as a neighborhood police officer, Wayne got involved in the Southside Raiders Youth Football and Cheerleading Program. He kept the program going long after he left the force. He was there for all youth, even those who were justice-involved, had trouble in school, or had fallen through the cracks in other ways.

Rev. Gregory Armstrong, Wayne's pastor at the time, noted that his church ran simulations for justice-involved people, based on the simulations done by Madison Urban Ministry (now JustDane). "We would hold them (simulations) in the lower level. A number of the membership was a part of that. It was part of the outreach that we did not only as a church, but also Wayne became involved in as a part of his philosophy for working towards justice."

Justice was always a value for Wayne, and it was part of his worldview. He especially hoped to steer young people to opportunities and help them stay out of the justice system.

"Wayne was really interested in them (kids in the Raiders Program) having some success," according to Isadore Knox. "And he was very passionate about it ... his goal was for the kids to have an opportunity to play football. And in that process, they learned things like team work, skill development, and all of those skills they would need to get to the next level, which would immediately be high school and eventually be college. I don't know how to describe his role. But he actually became pretty much the parent of the program ... it seemed Wayne knew every kid in the program," Knox recalled.

When kids got in trouble, their parents might call Wayne, according to Knox. "Not only would we meet with the kid, but in one case, we also met his mom and their defense attorney. We sat in on a session and just talked to the young man about where he was in his situation, and what he needed to do to move beyond it and be successful. Ironically, this is one of our current coaches now. Wayne was always there to support him, to mentor him, and he came back to the program."

Wayne was also a family man. "He cared greatly for his kids, cared greatly for his grandchildren. They were a priority for Wayne," Terri Strong told Madison365. "I mean, he would have meetings and would be upset if he missed the grandkids' karate class. He was a wonderful provider, father, and husband."

Wayne was nominated for the award by Jonathan Gramling, Noble Wray, Isadore Knox, and Rev. Gregory Armstrong. The nomination document stated that “He was a neighborhood officer in the Fisher-Baird neighborhood because that’s where young Black men at that time went. He was doing outreach. And he was talking. And he was getting to know these young men by name. ... In his mind, the way to really deal with young people was first through prevention, then intervention, and then restorative justice. Wayne was one of those rare police officers who understood this.” Wayne will be missed by many in our community.

The Reverend James C. Wright Human Rights Award honors the late Reverend Wright, a civil rights pioneer in Madison. During the 1960s, he worked on the adoption of the City of Madison's Equal Opportunities Ordinance, and served as Executive Director of the Equal Opportunities Commission from its inception in 1968 until his retirement in 1992. Rev. Rev. Wright was born in Camden, South Carolina.

The award is given to an individual who best exemplifies Rev. Wright's dedication and compassion for civil and human rights and who conducts their daily life consistent with these values. The award will be presented to Wayne’s wife, Terri, at the Common Council meeting on Tuesday, September 20, 2022.

[Prior recipients of the award](#) include: Jacqueline Wright, 1996; Dr. Richard H. Harris, 1997; Chief Justice Shirley Abrahamson; 1998; Helen Vukelich, 1999; Anthony "Nino" Amato, 2000; _John Noreika, Sr., 2001; Dr. John Y. Odom, 2002; Peter Munoz in 2003; Earnestine Moss in 2004; Jonathan "Jon" Gramling in 2005; Agnes Gutierrez Cammer in 2006; Jeffery Erlanger in 2007; Professor Richard Davis in 2008; Darlene Hancock, 2009; Alfonso Studesville, 2010; [Richard V. Brown Sr](#), 2011; Colleen Butler, 2012; Charlestine Daniel, 2013; Dr. Floyd Rose, 2014; Anthony Timmons, 2015; Annette Miller, 2016; Brandi Grayson, 2019; Tamora Fleming, 2020; Carmella Harris, 2021.

For more information, see: www.cityofmadison.com/civil-rights/about/awards/reverend-james-c-wright-award