

John D. "J.D." Lewis

Many African-American's who grew up in Raleigh remember J. D. Lewis as the "voice for African American Raleigh." Others recall Lewis as the first African-American to host his own local television dance program, WRAL-TV's Teenage Frolics. To those who followed his career, he is known a trailblazer in local broadcasting and community activism.

J. D. Lewis Jr. grew up in Raleigh on South Bloodworth Street. He starred in football and track at Washington High, and earned a scholarship to Morehouse College. In college, he met and married Louise Wilson.

Lewis served as a member of the Montford Point Marines, and was one of the first 200 blacks to serve in the US Marine Corps. His wartime experience in radar electronics prepared him to start a radio and television repair business.

Upon Lewis's return home, he built a mobile sound truck, and was hired by the Negro League to announce ballgames using his public address system. His reputation grew, soon crossing the color barrier.

In 1947, Capitol Broadcasting Company's (CBC) general manager Fred Fletcher attended a game and hired him on the spot. Lewis became the first African-American radio announcer in the state. His wide-ranging show aired until 1968.

In 1958, Teenage Frolics debuted on WRAL-TV with Lewis as show host. Raleigh residents enjoyed national recording artists like Isaac Hayes, Lou Rawls and The Dells, and interviews with local leaders. To this day, African-American adults in the Raleigh area reminisce about Teenage Frolics with the unforgettable J.D. Lewis.

Lewis served in other roles at CBC during a career spanning more than four decades. When WRAL made the leap to television, Lewis helped CBC secure its FCC license. In 1974, Lewis became the company's first human resources director. He recorded editorials for WRAL-TV, and served as its first minority affairs director. Upon retirement in 1997, Lewis asked that CBC make a donation to his favorite charity, the Garner Road YMCA, in lieu of a gift for himself. CBC and the A.J. Fletcher Foundation made donations totaling \$200,000 in his honor, helping establish the J.D. Lewis Multipurpose Center.

Lewis also provided leadership for numerous Raleigh civic organizations. He served multiple terms as chairman of the Garner Road YMCA board, and was instrumental in its establishment. His service to the YMCA resulted in the safe haven that exists today for Southeast Raleigh youth. He was a lifetime member of the NAACP, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, and a longtime member of First Baptist Church in Raleigh.

In 2007, Lewis received the Triangle Urban League's Legends Award, honoring him for his broadcasting career and commitment to Raleigh's youth. Other accolades included the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the NAACP and induction into the Hall of Distinction by the African-American Cultural Complex in Raleigh.

Lewis left a great void when he died in 2007 at the age of 87. His legacy lives on through his children and the many who were inspired by his on-air presence and his off-air commitment to serve the Raleigh community.

