

Rights leader Bright, 90, succumbs

Easton's 'Brother' known for demanding jobs, education, power.

By William J. Ford
Of The Morning Call

Thomas W. Bright, 90, was a civil rights leader who took blacks in Easton by the hand to demand jobs, better education and a level playing field in politics over five decades.

As recently as last October he was still seeking equal treatment for blacks. During a candidates forum in Easton he challenged County Executive Glenn Reibman to hire blacks in his 13-member cabinet.

The gentle yet spunky man, known to everyone who knew him as "Brother Bright," died Friday in Easton Hospital.

"The nurses told me when he woke up [Friday] morning he was talking and doing fine,"

BRIGHT PAGE B10



THOMAS 'BROTHER' BRIGHT, Easton area civil rights leader, with his wife, Marian, in April 2001.

Pete Shaheen The Morning Call

Luzerne man faces more bilking charges

Kurt Keiper is ordered to face court over an alleged scam that involved a farm family.

By Chris Parker
Of The Morning Call

FREELAND | The lawyer for Kurt J. Keiper called it a "business deal gone bad," but a Luzerne County district justice on Friday ordered Keiper to face court on seven more charges of theft by deception.

Keiper, already in jail on several similar charges, allegedly bilked a Dennison Township farming family out of more than a half-million dollars by promising them hefty profits on the resale of tires imported from Brazil and Spain.

COMING SUNDAY

■ A trail of bad checks and broken promises.

The family, Eugene and Lillian Evans and their adult son Charles, testified before District Justice Gerald Feissner that, against their better judgment, they gave Keiper about \$800,000 to invest after he convinced them others had made hundreds of thousands of dollars by chipping in to buy cheap tires.

Under questioning by Luzerne County Assistant District Attorney Timothy M. Doherty, Eugene Evans testified that Keiper, 30, of White Haven, eventually returned about \$250,000 to the family, which owns a peat moss farm.

"He said he'd work until the day he died to get our money back," Evans testified.

Keiper assured the family it was a "no risk investment, an easy way to make money," Charles Evans testified. "We never got the money, but we got a lot of promises."

Keiper, who authorities say

KEIPER PAGE B11

It's time to get aggressive about housing problems

Comment

**BILL
WHITE**



I wrote previously about the desperate straits of Easton's neighborhoods.

The Tom Goldsmith administration has ignored housing issues for the decade-plus he has been in office. Under his leadership, Easton has refused to participate in regional housing programs that have benefited Allentown and Bethlehem. What planning it has done under Planning Director Bob O'Neil has proceeded at the pace of continental drift.

Considering that we're midway through Goldsmith's third term, it's pretty clear a proactive approach to encouraging home-ownership was not one of the mayor's priorities. The 2000 census offered some insight into this inaction, revealing that fewer than half of Easton's residents live in owner-occupied hous-

ing.

So this month, a coalition of nonprofit development professionals, bankers and Easton residents offered City Council a \$2.3 million package of programs aimed at turning that trend around. "A Strategic Housing Plan for the City of Easton" essentially would create in Easton some of the same programs that have helped new homebuyers and existing homeowners elsewhere. It would require the city to pony up as much as \$500,000 of its windfall from inheriting, milking and selling the Restlawn housing project.

The rest of the funds for loans and grants would come from local lending institutions, Community Development Block Grants, county housing funds and other grant programs.

The panel that produced these proposals included two city councilmen and had the encouragement of a third, so there clearly is some political support.

But Goldsmith's reaction

was lukewarm. Coincidentally enough, he happens to be on the verge of presenting his own plans for spurring home-ownership, and he said, "They're consistent with what City Council is hoping to see the city do." The mayor said details are being "ironed out," and he won't divulge any details until he presents his plan over the next couple of weeks.

Goldsmith claims the timing has nothing to do with the coalition's proposal. And although he says he has other unnamed agencies in mind for his own plan, he said his unenthusiastic response to the coalition's proposals has nothing to do with a reluctance to work with Alan Jennings of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley or other nonprofit organizations involved in the effort. Jennings and others have been sharply critical of Goldsmith and O'Neil over the years.

Jennings said other regional organizations have seen the same lack of cooperation and participation that housing advocates have. "Then they

turn around and say, 'Boo hoo, poor us, we're Easton, nobody cares about us.'"

Easton Councilman Burns Bamford offered a glimpse of that kind of mentality with his comments the other day that he had reservations about contracting with "Allentown" organizations to run the programs. He told me that he

**He seemed troubled
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would have liked to see Easton city planners and more representatives of Easton charitable organizations involved in the group that formulated the plan. "I'm just saying there are people here who have expertise as far as this is concerned."

He seemed troubled by the idea that Easton can't handle

its housing problems on its own. "If we're a full-service city as we say we are," he pointed out, "then maybe our planning and development should have been on this a long time ago."

No kidding.

As I see it, City Council members have two choices. If they are content to hunker down against them outsiders and they newfangled idears, they should by all means reject this proposal and rely on the dynamic duo of Tom Goldsmith and Bob O'Neil to address the city's housing problems.

But if they want results sometime before interplanetary travel becomes routine, they need to shed their parochialism and embrace the aggressive approach called for in the coalition's strategic plan, perhaps in conjunction with the mayor's own proposal, if it looks promising.

Rome is burning. Quit fiddling.

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BRIGHT FROM PAGE B1

'Brother' fought for civil rights in Easton area.

said Bright's son, Waltar, on Friday afternoon. "Then he laid back and took his last breath. At least he's not in any more pain."

A viewing will be at 11 a.m. Wednesday with a funeral at noon at Union AME Church, 927 W. Berwick St., Easton.

Waltar Bright, 60, said his father had been in and out of the hospital since Thanksgiving. He remembers the last words his father said to him:

"Before I would leave, we would always say at the same

time, 'God Bless you, I love you.' "But whoever said that first had to top the other one in finishing the thought. I will always remember that."

Bright influenced many people.

In 1967, Alfredean Jones ran into Bright and told him he didn't get an interview for a teaching position at Easton Area High School, although he had a degree from South Carolina State University in health and physical education and a minor in science.

Bright immediately took Jones to the Easton administration building and Jones was hired as a high school science teacher. In 2000 he became the school's first black principal.

"He was my mentor. He enabled me to start my career," said Jones.

Esther Lee remembers Bright speaking several times in Easton's Centre Square during rallies for civil rights and

for ending workplace discrimination.

"He would stand there in that dark suit, white shirt and neck tie and speak loudly for equal rights," said Lee, president of the NAACP Bethlehem branch. "He spoke in Easton, but he also spoke for all blacks in the Lehigh Valley. He will be sorely missed."

Bright was born Nov. 16, 1911, in Albany, Ga. In 1936, he left Georgia and snuck onto trains heading north to the Bronx. He was able to get a job as a porter on a train and saved his money so his future wife, Marian Whitehead, could join him.

A year later he married her. They lived in the Bronx for 14 years and had three children.

He moved to Easton in April 1951 to find a better-paying job — as a laborer at the Lehigh Foundry in West Easton.

In 1963 Bright became president of the Easton NAACP chapter. Between then and the

early 1970s he picketed in front of City Hall and walked into city offices and schools demanding blacks be hired.

Bright ran unsuccessfully for Easton City Council as a Democrat in 1971. His effort opened doors for other blacks. William Houston served on Council for 14 years.

Bright opened Bright's Soul Food store in 1969 and was in business for 12 years. To honor his accomplishments Easton named a street after him in 1991.

Bright passed the baton to his son, Waltar, who became president of the Easton chapter last year.

In an interview for a Morning Call story last May, Bright said his eyes showed him change was needed.

"All these blacks in my neighborhood and they couldn't find jobs? That didn't make any sense. Blacks in the schools but no black teachers. No sir, I couldn't see that continuing."

Phillipsburg police solve rogue radio case

By Joe Nixon
Of The Morning Call

Phillipsburg police say they have solved the mystery of rogue radio transmissions that dogged department airwaves in recent weeks.

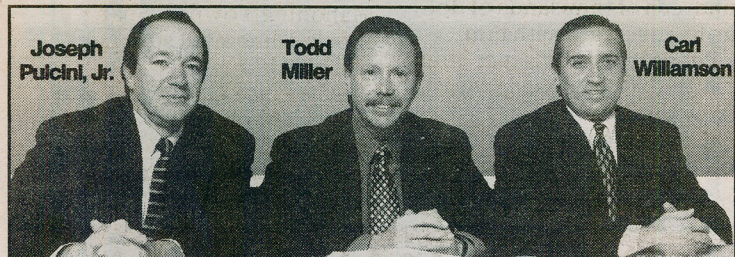
Officials said three teens — a 14-year-old from Holland Township, Hunterdon County, and 16-year-olds from Alpha and Phillipsburg — were arrested Thursday and charged with harassment and obstructing the administration of law or governmental function.

Police would not say if the teens were released or incarcerated.

The break in the case came through information obtained by patrol officers.

"Our patrol division did a super job leading the way through this investigation," said Detective Lt. Larry Marino.

Police said they confiscated radio equipment used by the teens, but would not comment on what the equipment was or how it was used to gain access to the department's radio frequency. "I just can't go into that stuff," said Marino.



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