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Alumnus Awarded NAACP honor

October 12, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Erwin Davis, a 1980 Illinois Wesleyan University graduate, has been named the recipient of the 2007 Community Service Award for the Bloomington-Normal Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He was honored Thursday at the annual Freedom Fund Banquet in Bloomington.

“Really, the honor has not sunk in,” said Erwin, speaking on his cell phone last week as he stepped off an elevator in Washington, D.C., where he was working with legislators on behalf of the National Urban League. “I think of the work I’ve done as being part of a group effort, and we all have good reasons for giving back.”

Davis, a manager with State Farm Insurance Companies in Bloomington, said he has four good reasons for giving to the community – his four children. “I take education personally because of my kids,” said Davis, who sits on the Bloomington-Normal Education Achievement Gap Task Force, and serves on the boards for the McLean County Urban League and Tri-County Urban League. “I consider education the key to one’s success. An intelligent ability in today’s society is critical. I wanted that for my children, and that’s why I have always put an emphasis on educational achievement.”

The belief he could make a difference was instilled in Davis at an early age. “I would spend summers with my grandparents in Arkansas,” said the Chicago native. “They were very active in the church and their community. I learned from them to always try to influence the development of the community for the better.” During his childhood, Davis saw how inadequate education could leave an entire community “blight” and lost. “Education has a tremendous emphasis on the quality of a neighborhood and a community,” he said.

A successful high school student who was active in community service through his church and the Boy Scouts, Davis was drawn to Illinois Wesleyan as an intimate place where education was revered. “My high school graduating class had 1,000 people,” said Davis. “I liked the smaller, family atmosphere I found at IWU,” he said. “I liked going into a classroom full of peers and building close relationships with my professors.”

Davis said he slowed his community service while at Illinois Wesleyan to concentrate on his studies. “Let me put it this way, I was an accounting major, so my activities were essentially my books,” said Davis, who was active with the Black Student Union on campus. He did meet his wife during his days at IWU, in fellow 1980 graduate Marsha Lockette Davis. “That is one of my best memories,” he said.

The Bloomington-Normal branch of the NAACP is the oldest branch of the organization in the state of Illinois, established in 1911. For more information go to www.bnnaacp.org.



Erwin Davis

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