

# Mansfield

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that as a bad time.

"It wasn't just bad for him, it was bad for all of us blacks," said the lifelong Mansfield resident. "There was so much hatred. They said he was stirring up trouble."

She remembers walking to town to go to the movies at the Farr Best Theater and seeing a sign on the sidewalk that read, "No (racial slur) allowed."

"We turned around and came home," said Norwood, 62.

McClendon "Mac" Moody was headed to work in Fort Worth when he saw the effigy swinging from the stoplight.

"It frightened me at first," Moody said. "I thought it was a real person. I thought it was pretty cowardly."

Moody, 78, dealt with racism every day in Mansfield, from having to stand aside at the grocery store check-out until all the white people were served to being expected to use only the back door when he visited the white homes where he did yard work and maintenance.

When he purchased a Texaco station in downtown in 1968, he would find notes slipped under his door that read, "You lucked out today. Next time the door might blow up in your face."

He began opening the station at 2 a.m. on his way to work in Fort Worth, so his family, who ran the station, wouldn't be harmed.

"I was afraid, but I had my life savings in it," Moody said.

Griffin had to have known his actions wouldn't be popular in Mansfield. When black activist T.M. Moody tried to integrate with three teen boys in 1955, hundreds of people showed up at the school and the Texas Rangers were sent in to keep the peace, even if it meant ar-

resting black people.

Mansfield's schools were not integrated until 1965, when Norwood, her sister and a small group of blacks enrolled.

"The teachers were rude and disrespectful to us," said Norwood, who was a senior. "They had no problem with the students doing it, too."

By the end of the year, though, things had changed.

"After the students got to know you, it didn't matter at all," she said.

The number of black residents remained small. Mayor David Cook, who started school at Alice Ponder Elementary in 1977, doesn't remember any black students in his class until the third or fourth grade. When he graduated from Mansfield High School in 1989, there were only about 40 minority students in his class of 362, he said.

"Our history may have something to do with the small number of black people," Cook said. "It may not have been attractive to black families. I think we've had a lot more (minority) people move in."

Figures from the 2010 Census back him up. Mansfield, which doubled in population since the 2000 Census, showed gains in every minority population, more than 500 percent in black and Asian residents and 143 percent in Hispanic residents.

So how did Mansfield get past its dark history? A step at a time.

Moody, who worked as a baker at a local grocery store, was approached by the owner of a local cafe to run for City Council in 1981. The cafe owner didn't like the way the white women came to Moody to order their cakes, Moody said, and told him he could probably win since he had so many white female friends. Moody, who was married, didn't like the implication and

was angry enough to run. He won, the first black elected to the Mansfield City Council.

"I wanted to pull Mansfield together," Moody said. "I wanted the west side to get noticed, to get them water, sewage, garbage and street lights. Somebody had to prove that all blacks weren't like they are portrayed."

Moody served for the next 20 years, still the only black to be elected to the council.

"I'd sit there like a speck in a glass of milk," he said. "There were three (council members) from old Mansfield and three from Walnut Creek. I had the last vote."

The schools were also slowly becoming diversified.

In 1970, Superintendent Willie Pigg approached Norwood and asked her to come to work in the school district because there were no other blacks working there, she said. She worked with Head Start, then as a teacher's aide in special education. In 1996, Norwood was certified as a teacher and taught science and multicultural exploratory until retiring in 2009. She loved teaching students to appreciate different cultures.

"If we understand each other's differences, we can have a better world, a better community," she said.

She worries about the outcry over Mansfield's new Arab studies program.

"It's the same old soup warmed over," she said. "Why wouldn't you want to know about somebody's differences? We can't lose respect for each other. We have to be patient and work together."

Working together is the key, Evans said, who saw the community come together to fight a local head shop last year.

"We realized that we had the same values," he said.

James Leggs, chairman of the West Mansfield Community Development Corp., sees the scars of

Mansfield's past healing as blacks and whites come together for common goals on the Habitat for Humanity houses, the health clinic on West Broad Street, Common Ground and Greater New Life Baptist Church. Members of Bethlehem Baptist, First United Methodist Church and local businesses have been working together to save the historic black church.

"Everyone (working) at that church, regardless of race or religion, came together to bring that church back to the Timbers," Leggs said.

"We're growing past it," he said. "History is history. We learn from it and move forward."

Leggs credits the Mansfield Cemetery Association for helping Bethlehem Baptist get the deed to the historic "colored" cemetery, which until last year no one legally owned. A fence still runs between the two cemeteries, separating the black and the white residents of Mansfield, even after death. Griffin, who spent the rest of his life working for civil rights, is buried in the white cemetery with his wife's family.

"That's the way it started," said JoAnn Harris, president of the Mansfield Cemetery Association, of the cemeteries, which date back to the mid-1800s. "Back then, everything was segregated."

Harris said there is no rule that keeps blacks from being buried on the white side, and that there is one black baby buried on the white side.

Norwood says patience, understanding and forgiveness are the ways to beat prejudice and move forward.

"I haven't been in the Farr Best since I saw that (racist) sign," Norwood said. "But I'm going (to see the film about Griffin's life). If I keep looking back, where am I going? You have to forgive."