

# Isaiah Edwards; Legacy Of Caring

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Dee Norton

Isaiah Edwards, a longtime leader in the African-American community, has died after a long illness.

Mr. Edwards, 80, died Saturday.

"When I became a firefighter, I thought that was pretty good," said Seattle Fire Chief Claude Harris. "But Mr. Edwards . . . got on my butt. He said that wasn't good enough. He told me I had a job, I didn't have to worry about where my next paycheck was coming from and that I needed to put something back in the community."

Mr. Edwards' actions matched his tough talk, Harris said.

"He was an activist who most of the time came down on the tough side of issues. He and (former Seattle) Mayor (Charles) Royer were very good friends but when Royer wanted to put a police precinct station at 23rd and Yesler, that did it.

"Mr. Edwards thought it would be bad for the community," Harris said. "And guess who won. Mr. Edwards."

Harris said that his friend and mentor, Mr. Edwards, worked nights at Boeing and then worked days on the International Baseball League that he founded to keep youngsters busy.

"Mr. Edwards didn't give a doggone about himself. He cared about the community. He believed in the system and he would put loud speakers on his truck and go through the neighborhoods getting out the vote.

"He is why the city has a trainee program for minorities. He noticed one day that all the firemen were white. He went to Chief (Gordon) Vickery and asked him why and Vickery told him it was

because they could not pass the entrance exam. So he told Vickery `Why don't you set up a farm system?' "

That was done, Harris said, and Mr. Edwards went on to other issues. He had already served on the board of directors of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair.

He was the first black to be a state delegate to the Democratic National Convention. He also was successful in his fight to ban use of the choke hold by police and jail personnel. That came after the 1983 death of a second black prisoner in the King County Jail in two years.

He is survived by his wife, Maria. Services are scheduled for 11 a.m. Saturday at Mount Zion Baptist Church.

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