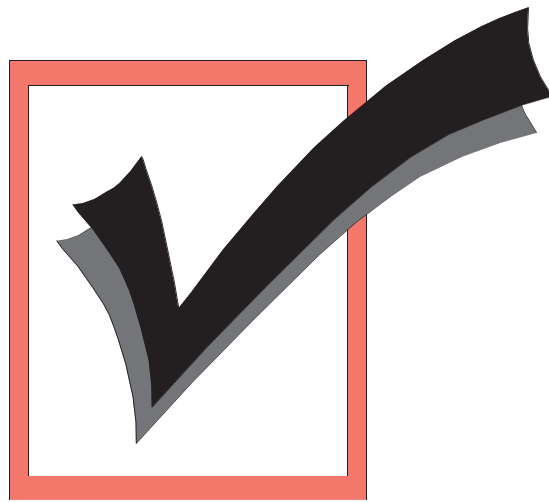


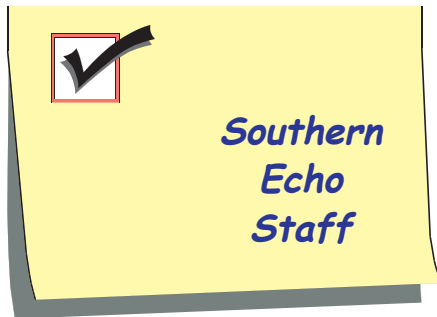
*Southern Echo, Inc.*



**TENTH YEAR CELEBRATION BANQUET  
TOUGALOO COLLEGE, TOUGALOO, MS  
DECEMBER 16, 2000  
6:00 PM**

**A DAY OF CELEBRATION & TRIUMPH**

**"WHY THIS, WHY NOW?"**



When we started the work of Southern Echo in 1990 we had no staff. When we raised our first resources in 1993 we hired Hollis, Leroy and Mike as the first staff.

Hollis came on staff in March, Leroy in April and Mike in June of 1993. We made a commitment to limit the size of the staff to seven, because our goal was to remain small — lean and mean — if you will. We did not envision building a large, centralized organization. We saw the focus on building local, grassroots organizations, controlled locally, with independent resources, setting their own agendas, and accountable to local communities, not Southern Echo.

But, as the program of work increased dramatically within the State of Mississippi, and into the southern region, we could not spread ourselves out without our ability to support the work becoming too thin. We expanded the staff to four, then six, then seven, then nine. At present it is at twelve. On January 3, 2001, the staff will expand to sixteen! This was not our vision, but it is our reality. We have a lot of work to do to learn how to manage, what is for us, such a big staff.

What has sustained us through time is the extraordinary commitment and vitality of this staff of such very diverse experience, background, gender, race and age. Our staff cover four decades in ages, from the twenties to the fifties. As intense as we can be, we know how to laugh, to cry and to support each other.

At the heart of the work of the staff is the active involvement in the training, technical and legal assistance which Echo shares community people and public officials with whom it is working. The staff also engages in extensive road travel across the state throughout the year. In the past three years, as the work of Echo has expanded into the southern region, and has also become recognized nationally, staff and community people have increasingly travelled to other southern states and throughout the country.

The extensive and intensive growth of the work has forced the staff to begin to engage in specialization. As a result, **Assistant Director Benda Hyde** has taken primary responsibility for *facilitating* Echo's *youth leadership development program*, working in support of the program's youth coordinators. **Helen Johnson** has undertaken the role of *education coordinator* for Echo, in support of the work of the Mississippi Education Working Group. **Nsombi Lambright** is training under the mentorship of Leroy Johnson to become our *resource development specialist*. **Mattie Stoddard** has taken on the awesome task of transforming the laid back culture of the Jackson office into a smoothly managed, efficient central office. **Derrick Johnson** is concentrating his work on the *redistricting* work, and is coordinating the administration of the training process. **Betty Petty** and **Betty Smith** are focusing their work on training and technical assistance support to the organizations in Sunflower and Tallahatchie counties. **Mac Epps**, in addition to being a full-time student enrolled in Tougaloo College, is a *coordinator* of the *youth leadership development program*. **Elizabeth Rosemeyer** passed the Mississippi Bar this year and is training under the mentorship of Mike Sayer to put her legal skills to work in support of local community organizations.

We honor our staff tonight for their commitment, hard work, diligence, persistence, good humor, mutual respect, and in recognition that we could not achieve our work without them.

*Southern Echo Staff:*

MAC ARTHUR EPPS  
BRENDA HYDE  
DERRICK JOHNSON  
HELEN JOHNSON

LEROY JOHNSON  
NSOMBI LAMBRIGHT  
BETTY PETTY  
ELIZABETH ROSEMEYER

MICHAEL SAYER  
BETTY SMITH  
MATTIE STODDARD  
HOLLIS WATKINS



When Southern Echo was conceived, we determined that we needed to have a Board of Directors comprised of individuals who were actively engaged in real work in their communities. To the extent possible, we wanted the members of the Board also to be actively involved in the work of Southern Echo. Such a board, we thought, would be best able to set policy for the organization, and hold the staff accountable, because their understanding of the vision, strategies and program of work of the organization would grow out of active involvement in the work.

As a result, every member of Echo’s Board during this decade has come onto the Board because of the work they had been doing in the community. From time to time members have rotated off the Board because of changes in their circumstances, and have made room for new members to come onto the Board who are actively involved in real work in their communities.

In the composition of the Board we sought to achieve diversity in experience, gender, generations, geography, and organizational affiliation. At present, we have twelve Board members, four of whom are twenty years of age or below, and six of whom are under the age of forty. In age, the Board represents seven separate decades. Every Board member is actively involved with a least one local community organization. Most are involved in several groups. Two have also been elected to city council positions in their communities and one has been elected to the county school board. All have been actively involved in the training, technical and legal assistance which Southern Echo has provided to the communities in which they work. Board members have been actively involved in raising funds for the organization, and in the sessions in which Echo develops its strategies and programs of work each year in support of the vision of the organization.

We honor all of our Board members, past and present, for their dedicated service to and on behalf of Southern Echo, and their invaluable contributions to its develop, success, and survival.

**PRESENT BOARD MEMBERS:**

*OLIVER RICE  
Chairperson  
Adams County, MS*

*SULAIMAAN ABDULLAH  
Lincoln County, MS*

*CLARA DAVIS  
Washington County, MS*

*MAC ARTHUR EPPS  
Holmes County, MS*

*RICHARD GARDNER  
Tallahatchie County, MS*

*CAROLYNNE HAWKINS  
Sunflower County, MS*

*ROSIE HEAD  
Holmes County, MS*

*CARMELLA JOHNSON  
Holmes County, MS*

*DAVIDA JOHNSON  
Sunflower County, MS*

*HOLLIS WATKINS  
President, Southern Echo  
Hinds County, MS*

*AL WHITE  
Montgomery County, MS*

*MARILYN YOUNG  
Tunica County, MS*

**Former Board Members:**

*April Daniel  
Indianola, MS*

*Kyrie Smith  
Sunflower County, MS*

*Tramaine Jones  
Holmes County, MS*

*Annie Noel  
Holmes County, MS*

*Melbah Smith  
Rankin County, MS*

*Ann Brown  
Holmes County, MS*

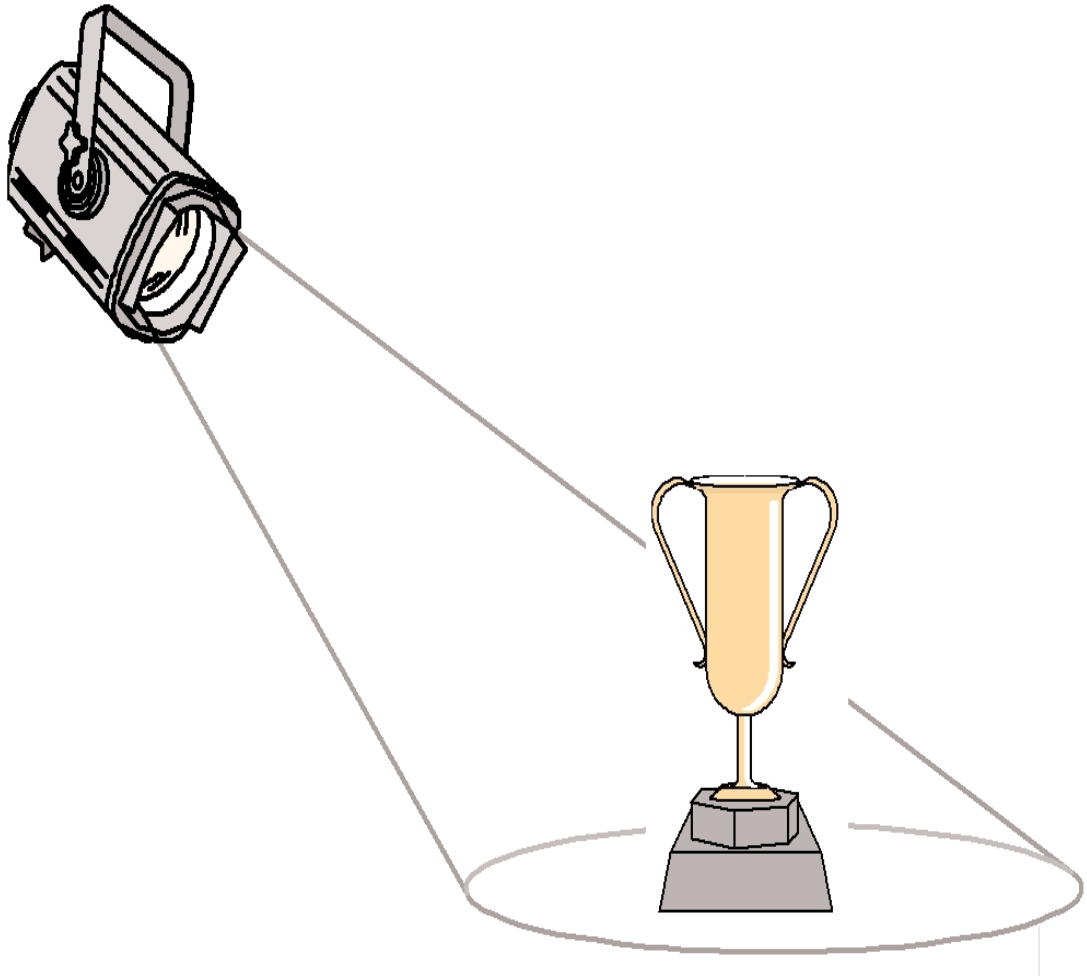
*Stephanie Parker-Weaver  
Hinds County, MS*

# HONORS AND AWARDS

As part of Southern Echo's 10 year celebration, we feel that it is most important to recognize and pay homage to those who have made our creation, survival, growth and success possible.

It is not possible at a celebration such as this to lift up every person who has had a hand in our work and enabled the communities with which to work to make such big strides in so short a time. Nevertheless, we seek tonight to honor some of the people whom we love and who have meant so much to us during the past decade. To these individuals and organizations we extend our love, gratitude and sincerest wish that our relationship can continue to flourish. To anyone that we have not given an award tonight, we hope that you know and understand that your spirit and work continues to be essential to our past and a critical part of the foundation for our future.

We have set out below explanations of the categories of honors and awards to be presented at the banquet, and those who have been chosen as recipients.





**Hollis Watkins** grew up as one of 12 children of a farming family so far down in the country of south Mississippi that his family lived in one county and got its mail in another. In 1961 Hollis became the first Mississippi student to join the fight of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to end white supremacy in the nation. For forty years, fortified by his indomitable spirit, love of family, sense of community, twinkle in his eyes, and song in his heart, Hollis defied the white establishment to work to empower the African American communities in Mississippi and the southern region.

But Hollis recognized that the empowerment process would not be effective if he just kept running helter skelter, responding to crises. He understood the need for an organizational base through which to replicate his work. This, he reasoned, requires committed, hard workers, rooted in the community, working from a common vision of the struggle through a meaningful program of work. They must be committed to collaborating together beyond the limitations imposed by the length of a single lifetime. But, he asked himself, if this can be done, how do you do it?

Hollis reflected a long time, sifting his extensive experience working with activist grassroots community people and organizations, experienced and novice, older and younger, fearful yet courageous, in every part of the state, during the past forty years. Out of this investigation Hollis birthed *Southern Echo* to be an experiment in struggle not before undertaken in Mississippi, in order to:

- build an African American controlled organization, based in the heart of the disenfranchised, rural African American communities of Mississippi, and the southern region, committed to uprooting racism through effective community organizing, as the means to empower the African American community at every level of government and in every aspect of the culture;
- involve young people in the work on the same basis as adults, through an *intergenerational model*, to develop, educate and train a cadre of community organizers that can bridge the generations to provide leadership to grassroots communities. As part of the work, the organizers would need to broaden the base of support for the vision and the work, and sustain the empowerment struggles beyond the lifetimes of the those who built *Southern Echo*, and of the local community organizations and community elders, and of those of us who eventually become the elders within our communities;
- provide training, technical and legal assistance to locally based grassroots community groups and community leaders to develop the tools and skills of community organizing in support of a vision, strategies and programs of work created and controlled by grassroots communities; and
- enable African American communities to pool their strengths and resources across traditional political and geographic barriers in order to impact the formation of public policy at all levels of government in response to the needs and interests of grassroots communities.

In order to breathe life into this vision, Hollis began in 1989 to reach out to those with whom he had built relationships through real work. As a result, *Southern Echo* was created in 1989, incorporated at the end of that year, and work in the communities began in earnest in the fall of 1990 after a year of intense, careful, analytical deliberation within a core group that Hollis brought together.

It has been Hollis' vision and model of selfless, resilient work, and his willingness to share his vast knowledge, experience, tools and skills that has inspired so many others to join the work which he began. It is for all of this, and so much more, that we honor **Hollis** with the *Founder's Award*.



**Leroy Johnson** grew up and still lives in the interior farmland of Holmes County on the eastern edge of the Mississippi Delta, where those who want to appear *ciditified* say they are from the county seat of Lexington, and where those who are proud of their country roots proclaim they are from Treadwell Grove (spoken as *Trebble Grove*). Hollis and Leroy first met in the early 1960s when Hollis was SNCC's Holmes County coordinator and Leroy was a "blanket baby" at mass meetings attended by his father, who was a farmer and activist in the struggle to get the right to register and vote.

**Mike Sayer** grew up in a six-story apartment house in the heart of densely urban, Brooklyn, NY. His parents were public school teachers and his father a union organizer. Mike first came south in 1961 and Hollis and Mike met when they were both on the staff of SNCC in the early 1960s in Mississippi. In 1989 Mike had been a practicing attorney for twenty years and had a successful law practice in rural, working class central Maine. Although Mike and Hollis had not seen each other for twenty years, they began to talk about the need for a new way to work. Ready to come back to the struggle, and relying on Hollis' faith in the people and the clarity of his vision, Mike moved to Greenville, MS, in 1989 to assist in building Echo from scratch.

In 1989 Leroy was executive director of the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center of Holmes County, which focused on multi-issue, intergenerational community organizing to build on the history of land-based, independent struggle in the county to empower the African American community. Hollis talked separately with Leroy and Mike to share his vision for a new way to struggle to empower the African American communities of Mississippi and the southern region.

While Leroy directed ROCC, Hollis worked for the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, and Mike was employed initially at the Center for Constitutional Rights, and later at Mississippi Action for Community Education. From these three separate bases, Hollis, Leroy and Mike began in 1989 to work intensively with grassroots community people and black public officials to anchor the work of Southern Echo in the rural, plantation communities of the Mississippi Delta.

In 1993, after three years of non-stop work, it was clear that Echo needed its own organizational identity, staff, and financial resources. Hollis, Leroy and Mike left the organizations with which they had been working to become the original staff of Southern Echo. Hollis became President and Leroy and Mike became Co-Directors. Their titles were not important to them. Their individual, varied strengths, joined together by the mortar of trust and commitment, became the building blocks for Echo's organizational development.

Leroy took primary responsibility for building the financial resources to support the work of the organization. With a radical vision about how foundations should support black-led community organizing groups working to empower their communities, Leroy not only built sustainable resources for Echo, but has been instrumental in enabling both new and experienced local community organizations, and regional collaborations to raise money to support their work. Leroy trained Mike to draft grant proposals and the supporting documentation and Mike took primarily responsibility for the writing of organizational materials. Hollis and Leroy also trained Mike to develop the tools and skills of organizing work in Mississippi communities, and Hollis and Mike took primary responsibility for providing training, technical and legal assistance to communities across Mississippi, and in eleven other southern states. Leroy has since become Director and Mike the Program Director of Echo.

Leroy and Mike have been resilient in facing down every challenge to the success of this experiment, restless in their efforts to make the organization realize its potential, and resourceful in attempting to share their skills and tools with others. It is in this spirit that we honor **Leroy** and **Mike** with the *Co-Founders Award*.





One of the things that we must not forget to do is to recognize and honor those among us who have:

- ☑ devoted their lives to the struggle to end second class citizenship for African Americans in Mississippi;
- ☑ provided leadership within their communities when it meant taking the risk that the white community would identify them as a leader who dared to challenge existing conditions;
- ☑ within their communities served as models of hard work and focused vision on ending racist policies;
- ☑ demonstrated by their courage and commitment that we, as a community, could overcome fear to work together to transform the culture;
- ☑ helped to bring others within the community into the work to empower the community;
- ☑ always shown respect for the people in the community who preferred to toil as one in the many, and reached out to them in building local organizations to strengthen the work;
- ☑ been determined to learn as much as possible the tools and skills of effective organizing and share them with others in the community to broaden the capacity of the community to engage in effective struggle;
- ☑ not been afraid to confront white public officials, and their black gatekeeper allies to change public policies which negatively impacted the African American community; and
- ☑ demonstrated by the longevity and diligence of their efforts that they have unselfishly devoted most of their lives to this effort, without concern for reward or recognition.

With these qualities in mind, we humbly lift up the following long-term leaders who have meant so much to the growth and development of Southern Echo and the communities in which they work:

**Mr. Oliver Rice**, Chair, Southern Echo Board of Directors (Madison, Hinds, Adams Counties)  
Past President, Madison County NAACP  
St. Paul AME Church Sunday School Outreach  
school teacher

**Ms. Clara Davis**, Member, Southern Echo Board of Directors, (Greenville, MS)  
Member, Greenville, MS City Council, Northgate Housing Association,  
Co-Director, Citizens Against the Location  
retired school teacher

**Mr. Richard Gardner**, Member, Southern Echo Board of Directors, (Charleston, MS)  
Police Commissioner, Charleston, MS City Council,  
Member, Tallahatchie Housing, Inc. Board of Directors  
Member, Tallahatchie Redistricting Committee  
Member, Tallahatchie NAACP  
businessman



It was the student movement that fueled the engine of the freedom movement in the deep south in the early 1960s. Students on campus. Students who had not yet completed their education, but were getting one that no college or university could deliver. Using their remarkable soulforce as a tuition payment for this advanced degree in the political and social sciences. A downpayment on a future for themselves and the entire community, black and white. A future some of them would never get to see so that we may get to see the future they envisioned.

**Tougaloo College** was a center for unrest and a safe haven in the struggle. As a private school it was not under the direct control of the State of Mississippi. Nevertheless, state political leaders did everything they could to try to shut it down.

Students at Tougaloo became actively involved in the demonstrations aimed at tearing apart the fabric of segregation which wrapped the entire society in its evil. Tougaloo was where planning discussions took place. It was where activists, younger and older, assembled together before setting out on their routes to the demonstrations. The campus was the place to which students and adults escaped after the demonstrations to blend into the family of people known as Tougaloo College. The college was one of the few places in the entire state, and southern region, where the First Amendment was alive and well, nurtured, supported, respected, and utilized for the very purpose for which it was created: to ensure that the people had an effective means through which to challenge the unfairness and injustice of an oppressive government, whether it be state or federal.

Tougaloo was a campus where black students were treated with respect and understanding, and appreciated both as students and as agents of change in a world too long dishonored by the yoke of racism. Tougaloo was a college where the students could obtain an education intended to enable them to compete in the world at large, rather than to be saddled with a process designed to limit their capacities.

Tougaloo College remains proud of its heritage and continues to play this role in the State of Mississippi. Since Echo began its work in 1990 Tougaloo College has made space, time, facilities, and other resources available to our organization. This has enable Echo to bring to Tougaloo College numerous community leaders, public officials, and community organizations from Mississippi, the southern region, and from across the nation to discuss, plan, provide training and technical assistance, take action, and then debrief and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the work.

The departments which schedule the facilities for our training sessions, the catering services and the buildings and grounds organizations within Tougaloo, have always been instrumental in enabling Echo to conduct smoothly and efficiently its extensive training programs held on the grounds of the college. All of this has been made possible by the extraordinary leadership and support we have always received from the several Presidents of Tougaloo College, and the Office of the President of Tougaloo College.

With all this in mind, we honor tonight **Tougaloo College**, and its **President, Dr. Joe Lee**, for the strategic role which it has played in the history of our struggle, and which it continues to play.





From the outset Southern Echo has not seen itself as the primary instrument of change. Rather, in our vision it is the decentralized African American based, grassroots community organizations, working separately in control of their own agendas, and spider-webbed together across the State of Mississippi, and eventually the southern region, to share their strengths and resources to enhance their work, that will ultimately transform the culture and empower their communities.

Tonight we honor seven Mississippi organizations with which Southern Echo has been working during this past decade. These organizations have been chosen because:

- ☑ they are committed to the vision of empowerment of the African American community and to hold public officials accountable to the needs and interests of the African American community;
- ☑ they are working to develop the tools and skills of community organizing as the essential means through which to build a democratically based struggle;
- ☑ they focus their work within the grassroots communities with the least political and economic power, and the least educational opportunity, as the foundation of their base of support;
- ☑ they are committed to developing an intergenerational model of community organizing work to ensure that the efforts of the organization and the community can be sustained;
- ☑ they are actively pursuing the training, technical and legal assistance which they need to support their program of work and are ensuring that a cross section of the community participates in this part of the process;
- ☑ they are working to develop a new generation of accountable leaders;
- ☑ they are willing to take risks, and make great personal sacrifices to move the agenda of their organizations;
- ☑ they are willing to collaborate with others in their communities, and with other organizations outside of their communities, to assist others in their work, as well as to support their own programs of work;
- ☑ they are willing to think outside the “box” in imaginative and creative ways to accomplish their goals.

These organizations have defied the skeptics in their communities who said this couldn't be done. They stood up to the white public officials and business leaders who told them that they were rocking the boat and that there would be consequences. They have faced down the pressure, the resistance, the threats, and the attacks coming from powerful white individuals and their gatekeeping allies in the black community.

Most important, they overcame their own fears and doubts whether they had the capacity to do this kind of work. They have proven to themselves that they can do it, and in the process have grown and transformed as individuals and as whole communities. They have also found each other, and have been collaborating together to assist each other in the work. Therefore, we honor:

***Action and Education Committee  
of Montgomery County  
Drustella White and Al White Co-Coordinators***

***Citizens for Quality Education (Holmes County)  
Ellen Reddy and Helen Johnson, Co-Coordinators***

***Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County  
Melvin Young, Executive Director***

***Drew Community Voters League  
Johnnie Johnson, Executive Director***

***Indianola Parent Student Group  
Mattie Todd and Betty Petty, Co-Coordinators***

***Marion County Self-Help  
Sister Rosa Shareef, Director***

***Tallahatchie Housing, Inc.  
Patricia Brown, Coordinator***



From the beginning we talked of educating and training a cadre of community leaders and organizers, based in the local communities from which they came, and bridging all age groups, who would develop the tools and skills of community organizing to use in support of a common vision of empowerment of an African American community knitted together like a giant spiderweb across the flatlands and hills of Mississippi.

We felt that only in this way could we achieve the goals for which Southern Echo was created. We knew from experience that not everyone with whom we began to work would be able to stay with the work. Some would participate for a while and then leave, for a variety of good reasons. Others would work for a while, do something else, then come back to the work. But some who began the work, we believed, once inside the crucible of struggle, would be uplifted in a way that would cause them to stay the course. It is these individuals that we hoped would become the core of the *new and emerging leaders* needed to transform the culture. But, first, it was necessary to enable people to transform themselves.

At the heart of the process for the individual in transformation is the development of an understanding of the true nature of the African American struggle to empower the community, in terms of where we have been, where we are, and where we need to go. It was the responsibility of Southern Echo, we reasoned, to create a process of training, technical and legal assistance, flexible, adaptable and accountable, to support the education and development, and the work in community, of those individuals who were prepared to work in support of the vision of empowerment of the community. Out of the work, we anticipated, would emerge those who would experience the greatest personal transformation and who, therefore, would be prepared to struggle to stay the course. Such individuals, working collaboratively within their communities and with each other, we maintained, will provide the leadership at the grassroots level to build accountable organizations through which the community can transform the culture of their respective communities, and therefore, the state as a whole.

Some of the individuals we honor this night we have had the pleasure and rewards of working with since Echo began working in communities in 1990. Others have emerged along the trail to lift up the work. Without them we could not have achieved any of our successes. Some of these remarkable individuals are more than forty years old, and others are only eleven years old. But each of them have been working with local community organizations and Southern Echo for a number of years. Some have their shoulders to the freedom plow in the Delta plantation country of the northwest part of the state, and others are working in the southeastern part of the state. What is common to each of them is a pair of intense, sparkling eyes, ready broad smile, and uncommon thoughtfulness that reveal a vibrant spirit, fierce passion for righteousness, and growing courage, notwithstanding the deeply rooted culture of fear, which fuels their relentless energy and commitment to build their skills and tools, and to work to liberate their communities from the shackles long imposed.

Therefore, we honor them tonight as the best evidence that our experiment is working:

**Mr. Bobby Banks, Phillip, Tallahatchie County**  
**Mr. Chris Caldwell, Duck Hill, Montgomery County**  
**Ms. Mildred Conley, "Old Sub", Tunica County**  
**Ms. Mary Covington, Drew, Sunflower County**  
**Mr. Mac Epps, Holmes County**  
**Ms. Kimberlyn Galvin, Indianola, Sunflower County**  
**Mr. Sabir Haqq, New Medina, Marion County**  
**Ms. Carolynne Hawkins, Indianola, Sunflower County**  
**Ms. Rosie Head, Lexington, Holmes County**  
**Ms. Davida Johnson, Drew, Sunflower County**  
**Ms. Johnnie Johnson, Drew, Sunflower County**

**Mr. Kahlil Johnson, "Treadwell Grove", Holmes Cty.**  
**Mr. Lonell May, Indianola, Sunflower County**  
**Mr. L. T. McCurry, Indianola, Sunflower County**  
**Ms. Ashley McKay, "Hambrick Sub", Tunica,**  
**Ms. Shaneika McKay, "Hambrick Sub", Tunica**  
**Ms. Ellen Reddy, West, Holmes County**  
**Mr. George Ross, Holmes County**  
**Sister Rosa Shareef, New Medina, Marion County**  
**Ms. Adrienna Stroud, Holmes County**  
**Ms. Drustella White, Duck Hill, Montgomery County**  
**Ms. Marilyn Young, "Hambrick Sub", Tunica**  
**Mr. Melvin Young, "Hambrick Sub", Tunica**



There aren't many individuals to whom such labels apply as visionary, fearless, uncompromising, jack of all trades, Renaissance Man, or The Man. Most extraordinary, all of these terms apply to **Henry Kirksey**.

Beneath his penetrating eyes and infectious laugh, lies an indomitable political energy and penetrating insight guided by a relentless drive to uncover facts, analyze their meaning, frame the truth, and to share all of that with grassroots communities across Mississippi in the pursuit of justice and fairness.

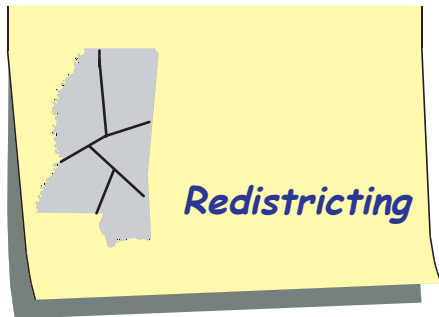
Kirksey has been a fighter all his life. He has never been afraid to speak his mind or fight a battle, even if he was the only one ready to step forward. While he often seemed indifferent to his own well being, he has been tireless in his work on behalf of individuals and community that needed his help.

Kirksey has used his multiple talents to serve us all as an educator, writer, publicist, journalist, demographer, statistician, redistricting specialist, investigator, printer and publisher, and public official. In each of these roles he has never shied away from functioning as a gadfly, maverick, and independent spirit, willing to jam the gears of segregation with the many strategies and tactics he devised and undertook, even when on these paths others feared to tread. For example, Kirksey raised the state confederate battle flag issue ten years before it became an issue either in South Carolina, Georgia or Mississippi. Kirksey raised the issue of disparity of educational opportunity between blacks and white at all levels of education in the state long before it became safe to do so.

Kirksey was the lead plaintiff in most of the redistricting cases brought in Mississippi to bring the state into compliance with the 1965 Voting Rights Act in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Mississippi was a dangerous place to do so. This was instrumental in opening the door to the creation of fair redistricting plans throughout the state. As a result, Mississippi today appears to have more African American elected and appointed officials at every level of government than any other state in the nation. As part of this process, Kirksey became the first African American elected to the Mississippi Senate since Reconstruction. His presence there helped to make it clear that black legislators, and other public officials at all levels of government, were there to fight for right and would willingly challenge the process, rather than to rubber stamp injustices. Kirksey worked intensively with Southern Echo during its redistricting efforts in 1990 and 1991 to provide training to Echo leadership, and to community activists, leaders and public officials, to ensure that we and they understood how the redistricting process works, and the role which the community can play to create fair redistricting plans.

Kirksey ran for many offices, at great personal sacrifice, to lift the consciousness of the people about issues he knew we needed to understand, but which traditional politicians refused to raise. For example, Kirksey ran for Lt. Governor in 1991 in order to take sufficient votes away from incumbent Lt. Governor Brad Dye to ensure a victory for Dye's opponent. Dye was a die-hard segregationist who had tried to close down Tougaloo College in retaliation against the college for its support of the freedom movement. The victory of Dye's opponent also opened the door to a resolution of the redistricting fight in the state Senate on terms demanded by the African American community.

We can't do justice to Kirksey in writing about him. There is only one Henry Kirksey! For that reason and so many others, the first *Henry Kirksey Award* is given to **Henry Kirksey** in his honor.



In 1990 Southern Echo began its first major effort around the redistricting of political districts at all levels of government in Mississippi. We understood that the white community, no longer able to keep black citizens from registering to vote and voting, saw the drawing of political districts as the modern device through which the white community could make it extremely difficult for accountable black candidates to win elections. Thereby, the white community reasoned, it could maintain exclusive control of the political and education systems.

Until 1990 this strategy had been effective to limit the extent of success of black candidates. But, in 1990 the culture of the redistricting process was transformed. The Southern Echo leadership worked under the umbrellas of the Mississippi Redistricting Coalition and the Delta Redistricting Working Group to provide training, technical and legal assistance to grassroots communities. As a result, hundreds of black citizens became involved in the redistricting process, including participation in public hearings at the state, county and municipal levels, and in the drawing of plans which could give the black community a reasonable opportunity to elect candidates of their own choice who would be accountable to the needs and interests of the black community.

**Carroll Rhodes** is a Hazlehurst, MS attorney with a keen sense of humor and robust laugh which tend to disguise his capacity for fierce mind to mind combat on behalf of the African American community. Always learned, Carroll has remained a student of change, quick to integrate new information into his analysis of strategies to support the empowerment of the African American community.

Carroll has been the lead counsel and instrumental in most of the redistricting fights brought by the African American communities of Mississippi. He is nationally recognized for his expertise in this area. Carroll played a central role as a lead attorney, trainer and litigator in support of the strategies and program of work of Southern Echo around redistricting. He participated in strategy sessions across the state and in training workshops at the county and state level for community activists and black public officials. He helped to organize a collaboration of Mississippi attorneys to guide the redistricting work and demonstrated that Mississippi attorneys, working with the community as its guide, had the capacity to win these fights without the involvement of the national legal civil rights organizations. He also served on the negotiating teams which engineered the settlement of the redistricting fight in only 18 months, instead of the 14 years it had taken in the previous redistricting. Carroll also was instrumental in helping to draw redistricting plans at the state and county levels and to evaluate the plans of state and county officials. Carroll has been Henry Kirksey's attorney in these fights for almost two decades and represented Hollis Watkins as lead plaintiff in the 1991 legislative redistricting litigation.

In the 1992 special legislative elections black citizens turned out in record numbers to double the size of the Legislative Black Caucus from 21 in 1991 to 42 in 1993. In 1995 the black community held every seat and added three more, to increase the size of the Caucus to 45. At the county level, the black community elected 30 percent of all the county supervisors in the state. There was also a significant increase in the election of black candidates for municipal and other county offices, and especially for justice, circuit and chancery court judgeships. Some counties elected black candidates to offices for the first time ever. The state had never seen anything like it. The Legislative Black Caucus now holds the balance of power on appropriations bills in the state legislature.

When we entered the redistricting fight in the early 1990s, Carroll showed us the way. He trained us to understand how the process works and how we could break it down so that lay people without special legal or demographic training could understand it. This enabled us democratize the process through organizing. For these reasons, and so much else, we honor our brother, **Carroll**, for his invaluable service and assistance.



From the outset of our work ten years ago, building relationships with public officials was a critical objective. After all, public officials at the town, county, state and federal levels have a decisive impact on the formation of public policies which impact the grassroots African American communities across the state and the region.

Consequently, we also focused in our community organizing work on building organizations and leadership that could hold public officials accountable to the needs and interests of the African American community. As part of this process, we sought to identify through the work individuals in the community who demonstrated that they could and would be accountable to the community. We defined accountability as putting community interest over self interest. We encouraged such individuals to aspire to public offices at all levels of government in Mississippi. In many of the towns and counties in which we were working, African Americans had never been permitted to run for such offices, not to mention actually win an election for such offices.

The individuals listed herein we honor for their courage to decide to run, campaign and actually win public offices in order to work for the empowerment of the African American community and to be accountable to their needs and interests. We know that in every instance it represented great personal risk and danger for their families, intense personal sacrifice, and a commitment to press their way through doorways into the rooms where the formation of public policy had always taken place and where few, if any, African Americans had been able to tread before them.

Some of the individuals we honor were groundbreakers in their own right before Southern Echo came into being. We honor them twofold: for having paved the way and made it possible for those who came after them, and for relentlessly continuing their important work on behalf of their communities as a model for their younger compatriots. We also know that the work of Southern Echo to create and sustain an organized community to support and protect the emergence of our elected officials in many different ways assisted in making it happen. And we are so proud of our associations with them. In this spirit, we are pleased to honor:

**Cong. Bennie Thompson** (MS, 2nd Cong. Dist.)

**Sen. Alice Harden** (Sen. Dist. 28) — Hinds County

**Sen. John Horhn** (Sen. Dist. 26) — Hinds and Madison Counties

**Sen. Robert Johnson, III** (Sen. Dist 38) — Adams, Wilkinson, Amite and Pike counties

**Sen. Bennie Turner** (Sen. Dist. 16) — Clay, Oktibbeha, Lowndes and Noxubee counties

**Sen. Johnnie Walls** (Sen. Dist 12) — Washington and Bolivar counties

**Rep. Robert Clark** (House Dist. 47) — Holmes, Attala and Yazoo Counties

**Rep. Reecy Dickson** (House Dist. 42) — Noxubee, Kemper and Lauderdale Counties

**Rep. Robert Huddleston** (House Dist. 30) — Leflore, Tallahatchie, Quitman and Sunflower counties

**Circuit Court Judge Tomie Green**

**Mr. Jerome Little** (Dist. 5 Supervisor, Tallahatchie County)

**Mr. Alfonso White** (Montgomery County School Board member)

**Sheriff Frank Davis** (Claiborne County)

**Sheriff Willie March** (Holmes County)

**Mr. Robert L. Grayson, Mayor**, Town of Tutwiler (Tallahatchie County)





For the first three years of its intensive organizing work across the State of Mississippi around redistricting and education issues, Southern Echo had no funds of its own to support the work, nor any paid staff, office, phones, or transportation of its own. Echo relied entirely on the volunteer efforts and contributions of Hollis, Leroy, and Mike, and the in-kind contributions of others with whom they collaborated.

Starting late in 1992, picking up steam in 1993, and intensifying in the ensuing seven years, several individuals in the foundation world played an especially significant role in enabling

Southern Echo to spring to life as an independent organization with its own resources with which to carry on the struggle to empower the African American community in Mississippi and the southern region. These individuals understood the vision of the leadership of Southern Echo, and committed to assisting them to develop the resources to nurture the work.

These individuals did so much more than simply provide access to grants at their own foundations. They provided:

- especially important encouragement to us to be aggressive in moving the agenda of Echo and sought to validate the importance of the work,
- willingly gave wise counsel and shared thoughtful analysis as to how to develop resources in a sustaining way, assisted actively in helping us to make useful contacts at, and opened the doors for us, at other foundations, and enabled us to meet the key people who guided them, and
- built a recognition throughout the progressive funding world of the importance of supporting with meaningful resources community based, African American led grassroots organizations across the south.

They taught us, so that we could teach others, that real work rather than idle rhetoric is what gets support from foundations and individuals that are eager to support the empowerment of grassroots communities.

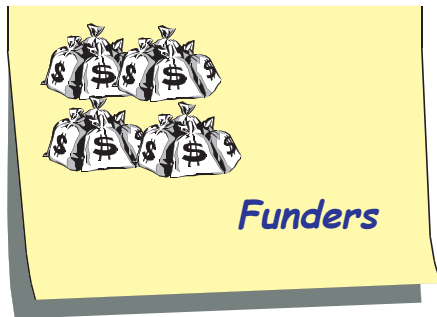
In addition to the support of our work, these individuals also cared deeply about the health and well being of the individuals in Southern Echo. They worried about the endless long days, weeks and months of stress laden, pressurized work, without breaks for days off, vacation, or even time to play. They knew this was bad for us and pressed us to yield to the reality of our limitations. We resisted, apparently impervious to common sense and harm's way, caught between the sense of urgency of the work and the illusion of immortality that plagues those who would seek to transform what is into what ought to be.

They took their measure of us, believed in us and supported us when we had nothing but the relationships we had built with people in grassroots communities and the work we had done together with them. As a result, others were willing to risk supporting us, too. Further, their support enabled us to hire more staff, create a central office and satellite home/offices, develop the technological and transportation support needed to make the work happen, and to open the doors to local organizations to begin to raise their own funds to support locally developed and controlled agendas.

For these reasons, and so much more, we honor:

- Ms. Erica Hunt**, New World Foundation, Program Officer
- Ms. Barbara Meyer**, Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation, Board member
- Mr. Hubert Sapp**, Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation, Board Chair
- Ms. Marcia Smith**, Ford Foundation, Program Officer
- Ms. Alta Starr**, New World Foundation, Program Officer





During the past ten years many foundations supported the work of Southern Echo. These funds enabled us to raise other resources, all of which was essential to the growth and development of our organization, its staff and allies, and the work which we undertook.

For some of these organizations providing support to an organization like Southern Echo was considered a departure from their norm at a time when most foundations were not accustomed to supporting African American led grassroots organizations in the deep south. This risk-taking by the many foundations that supported us has helped to transform the culture of philanthropy during this period

and has generated a framework of new and extended support from the progressive and mainstream foundations. This development is extremely important to the creation and sustenance of experimental efforts within Mississippi and across the southern region.

This will generate a level of experience within communities, and the development of new leadership and organizations, absolutely essential to the empowerment process. While not every organizational effort will ultimately succeed in its goals, the trial and error is essential to the development of a generation of new leaders, younger and older, armed with the self-confidence to figure how to do it well enough to impact the formation of public policy at all levels of government.

We salute these foundations for their support to us and others, and honor them tonight in recognition of the invaluable role which they have played in our growth, development, and such success as we have achieved in this past decade. These foundations are:

**Abelard East Foundation**

**Annenburg Rural Trust**

**Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation**

**Beldon Fund**

**Boehm Foundation**

**Catholic Campaign for Human  
Development**

**Center for Community Change**

**Ford Foundation**

**French American Charitable Trust**

**Funding Exchange**

**Edward W. Hazen Foundation**

**Kellogg Foundation**

**Albert A. List Foundation**

**Bert and Mary Meyer Foundation**

**Charles Stewart Mott Foundation**

**McKnight Foundation**

**Needmor Foundation**

**New World Foundation**

**Norman Foundation**

**Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation**

**Open Society Institute**

**Ottinger Foundation**

**Peace Development Fund**

**Progressive Technology Project**

**Public Welfare Foundation**

**Rockefeller Foundation**

**Threshold Foundation**

**Tides Foundation**

**Twenty First Century Foundation**

**Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program**