



Devoyd Jennings

Devoyd “Dee” Jennings, longtime president and CEO of the Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce has died.

Details are pending, but a message from FWMBCC Chairman Sultan H. Cole, Sr. on Saturday afternoon said: “It is with deep regrets that we acknowledge the passing of our esteemed president Dee Jennings. We all recognize the deep and life-long connection Mr. Jennings had with the Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce. He will be missed immensely but in the true spirit of who Dee was, he would want us to move forward to maintain, protect and grow the legacy that he spent his life building.”

The FWMBCC said he passed away Saturday, July 24. Jennings was born in 1947.

A native of Fort Worth, Jennings grew up supporting the gold and blue at I.M. Terrell High School, graduating in 1966. He was part of the legendary Coach Robert Hughes 1965 state basketball championship team at I.M. Terrell. He enrolled at Tarrant County College and later attended Texas Wesleyan University, graduating with a degree in marketing in 1971.

In 1973 he began a 27-year journey with TXU as a Community Affairs Specialist and was the first Black lobbyist for Texas Electric. Jennings served on numerous boards over the years, including: The Texas Association of Business – 1995 to 2014; Texas Wesleyan University – 1989 to 2008; North Texas Commission – 1993 to 2003; and the Texas Association of African American Chambers, He served as chairman of the NTTA’s Business Diversity Advisory Committee, 2009-2013.

In 1992 and again in 2005, the city of Fort Worth honored Jennings with a proclamation for Devoyd Jennings Day. In 1999 he was featured by the Fort Worth Business Press as Who’s Who in Economic Development and received the Deal Maker Award from the Business Press in 1998. In 2016 he was involved in the leadership of the effort to reopen I.M. Terrell High School as a STEM & Performing Arts Academy.

Jennings helped create two stand-alone organizations that directly benefit minority development – the William Mann Community Development Corp., a financial lending agency; and Southeast Fort Worth Inc., a community development agency that fosters development in east and southeast Fort Worth specifically. He’s also worked with government bodies and others such as the city of Fort Worth, Arlington, JPS Health Network, Tarrant County and the Fort Worth ISD to help establish minority and women-owned business enterprise goals.

When Jennings was honored with a Minority Leaders in Business Award by the Fort Worth Business Press in 2017, he noted his mentors:

“My most significant mentor is longtime educator, politician and community leader Reby Cary, the first African-American to serve on the Fort Worth school board and one of the first Blacks from Tarrant County to serve in the Texas Legislature. My most significant role model is legendary basketball coach Robert Hughes Sr.,” he said.

Accolades and remembrances began pouring in as news of Jennings’ passing spread.

“Dee Jennings was a pillar of the Fort Worth community, a true friend and inspiration to so many, including my own family,” said Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker. “We are sending out love and prayers to the entire Jennings family, the chamber and all of his many friends who love him dearly. Dee leaves behind a remarkable legacy because of his devotion to this community and willingness to continually lead and make all of us better.”

“We have lost one of our larger-than-life community leaders in Fort Worth today,” said U.S. Rep. Marc Veasey, D-Fort Worth. “My sincerest condolences to Gwen Barbee and the family of Devoyd Jennings, President of the Fort Worth Black Chamber of Commerce and proud I.M. Terrell alumni.”

From Robert L. Jameson, president and CEO of Visit Fort Worth: “Dee was a dedicated leader for our community. Our friendship dates back more than 30 years and was founded in mutual respect and partnership. I will miss his counsel. He was a tireless promoter of our city to people from other places, and was instrumental in bringing many meetings and conventions of all sizes to Fort Worth. As these past several years have tested our community in the area of social justice, Dee was a staunch advocate for necessary changes that could help our city be better for all its citizens. Our prayers are for his family in their time of such sadness.”

Former Mayor Betsy Price posted a statement on her Facebook page: “Today, we are deeply saddened by the loss of Dee Jennings. Dee was a dear friend and confidant throughout my time as Mayor. Dee was a true champion for our community and a visionary who led the Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce as President and CEO. His leadership and love for our community will be missed, but his legacy will live on for future generations to come.”

Officials at other chambers in the city also expressed condolences.

“I’m so saddened to hear of the sudden passing of my dear friend and colleague Dee Jennings,” said Anette Landeros, president and CEO of the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. “Dee was the type of person who welcomed everyone to the table and genuinely wanted everyone to succeed. He was kind but firmly stood by his beliefs. He lived through the most difficult times in our city but also passionately believed that opportunity could be created. He worked diligently to create those opportunities for our Black community until his last day on this earth, and I feel that is how he would have wanted to be remembered.”

“Dee always had a smiling face and a witty comment to make you laugh,” said Brandom Gengelbach, president and chief executive officer of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. “He loved Fort Worth with all his heart. We had many a conversation where he would share Fort Worth’s history from his life growing up here and how the lessons of the past are applicable to the challenges of today. I will miss my friend and fellow Chamber associate.”

Leaders around the city also issued statements.

“Dee Jennings has been such a good friend to so many; I am grateful to have been among them. He was a wonderful supporter of Leadership Fort Worth and was always willing to do whatever we needed,” said Harriet B. Harral, former executive director of Leadership Fort Worth.

“We frequently turned to him to get insights on current events. One of the things I so appreciated about him was how he supported the career and professional development of others. He often contacted LFW to tell us about an up and coming professional that he thought should be in one of our classes – and he was a terrific advocate for those people,” Harral said.

Tobi Jackson, president of the Fort Worth ISD Board of Directors recalled how Jennings began to talk about the plan to reconstruct his high school alma mater, I.M. Terrell.

“He and The Honorable Bert Williams were our first call when Dr. T.A. Sims had the great idea to reconstruct I.M. Terrell and the first to walk and talk about the project on the Terrell property,” she said. “In the fall of 2018, Dee spoke to Zoie about the rich history of I.M. Terrell. She was accepted to Terrell and Dee was our first call along with Sir Eddie G. Griffin. This is how important Devoyd’s guiding hand has been in our lives and that of so many within Tarrant County.”