

News

Chicago Reader Now Black-Owned Thanks to Dorothy Leavell

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Dorothy Leavell, the fiery and fearless chairman of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA) and publisher of the Chicago and Gary Crusader newspapers, announced that she has led a group in purchasing the “Chicago Reader.”

Terms of the deal were not disclosed, but it’s a historic purchase that brings the alternative newspaper with an audited weekly circulation of about 85,000 into the NNPA family of 220 African American newspapers and media companies.

The paper had most recently been owned by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, which reportedly will maintain a 15 percent stake in the Reader after the sale closes later this month.

“I see this as an opportunity to enhance the value of the Black Press through the [Chicago Reader],” Leavell told NNPA Newswire. “It is [now] definitely Black-owned.”

Sun-Times CEO Edwin Eisendrath joined Leavell at the Rainbow PUSH Convention in Chicago to first reveal the sale.

“We love the *Reader* and have worked hard



NNPA Chairman Dorothy Leavell said that she wants to expand the Chicago Reader’s long-form, investigative reporting.

to be sure it has a foundation for the future. All of us at the *Sun-Times* are thrilled that the *Reader’s* future is in such good hands,” Eisendrath said.

Such a marriage perhaps had less than a small chance of being consummated 25 years ago when the *Reader* staff poked fun at the NNPA and Leavell after Civil Rights Leader Nelson Mandela failed to attend a Black Press convention when he toured America after being released from prison in 1993.

In an article headlined, “Black Press Feels Neglected,” the *Reader* noted how Mandela found time for Ted Koppel, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, but not the NNPA, which held its annual convention in Chicago at that time.

“The NNPA, which is the nation’s principal Black Press organization, was deeply insult-

ed,” according to the article, which quoted Leavell, then Secretary of the NNPA.

Leavell and then-NNPA Executive Director Steve Davis jointly told the media that it wasn’t Mandela’s fault but those who scheduled him. “The visit has brought us to the realization that we must insist on the right to participate in all decisions involving the welfare of Black people,” they declared.

Now a quarter of a century later, Leavell has purchased the *Reader*.

Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas on October 23, 1944, Leavell attended Roosevelt University.

She was first elected president of the NNPA in June of 1995 for a two-year term and was re-elected in June 1997 ending her term in 1999.

Leavell was credited with increasing the visibility and international

stature of the trade organization. In June of 2006, Leavell was elected Chairman of the NNPA Foundation.

She was voted in as national chairman again in 2017.

“The NNPA resolutely congratulates our esteemed chairman, Dorothy R. Leavell, the publisher of the *Chicago Crusader* and the *Gary Crusader*, on her acquisition of the legendary *Chicago Reader* publication,” said Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., the president and CEO of the NNPA. “This acquisition comes at a strategic national moment when the Black Press in America is growing, expanding, innovating and increasing market share across the United States.”

Further, the NNPA is experiencing significant

increase in readership and engagement of African-American millennials in both out print and digital products, Chavis said.

like to see the *Reader’s* long-form, investigative reporting expanded.

“We are going to broaden that scope,” Leavell said. “We want to be in

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“The Black Press has consistently maintained its trustworthy status with Black America at a time when there has been an erosion of trust in so-called mainstream media,” Chavis said. “For all of these contemporary reasons the future of the Black Press is reassured and affirmed by 47 million African Americans and millions of others throughout the world.”

Leavell said that she’d

every community to bring you the news that you enjoy already. We’re going to be expanding. We will increase our cultural information. You want to know what’s happening in Chicago? You gotta read the *Reader*.”

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Born in San Francisco, Breed was raised by her grandmother in the city’s public housing.

Breed praised United States Senator Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), among others, as being an influence. She said she wanted to emulate her grandmother, who took care of the community and looked after everyone.

“It’s really amazing, and it’s really an honor and I know it means so much to so many people,” she said, responding to a question about being the first African American female to earn election to the city’s mayor’s office. “This is my home and I grew up in some of the most challenging of circumstances.”

Breed continued: “I think the message that this sends to the next generation of young people growing up in this city, that no matter where you come from, you can do anything you want to do.”

In a January interview with NNPA Newswire, Breed said she planned to remain the same outspoken, 43-year-old who was raised on the hard knock

streets of the Fillmore District, just southwest of Nob Hill.

“People sometimes say about me, ‘I can’t believe, she said that.’ I remind them, I’m from Fillmore, but I say it in the way we say it in the streets—‘Fill-Mo,’” Breed said. “When you come from the kind of community that I come from and experience a lot of frustration, if you are not outspoken you can’t get the things done that you need to [get done].”

After first being appointed to take over for Lee after his death on December 12, local media noted that Breed has been criticized for being “headstrong” and “outspoken,” once even announcing to her peers that she “was no shrinking violet.”

“I am who I am, and I didn’t think I’d ever run for office, because I am who I am,” Breed said. “I say what I feel like I need to say and that’s how I’ve always been, and I couldn’t live with myself, if I felt that I have to change to be an elected official.”

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