

Admirers honor slain Freedom Inc. leader Leon Jordan

BY BRIAN BURNES - THE KANSAS CITY STAR
07/14/2014 11:54 PM | Updated: 07/14/2014 11:54 PM



On Monday afternoon inside the Green Duck Lounge and Grill, Bruce Watkins Jr. (lower center) watched Walter Allen hang historical photos of Leon Jordan and others. DAVID EULITT / THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Leon Jordan died 44 years ago Tuesday.

To mark the moment, admirers of the political leader and former police lieutenant will dedicate a display of Jordan photographs Tuesday at the Green Duck Lounge and Grill, the Prospect Avenue establishment outside of which he was shot July 15, 1970.

The group also will be soliciting petition signatures in support of having the Kansas City Police Department's East Patrol Division facility, which is being built near the tavern, named after Jordan.

Although it is too early to gauge the police department's enthusiasm for that idea, there are other possible scenarios for honoring Jordan, said Bruce Watkins Jr., an organizer of Tuesday's event.

He imagines a permanent display honoring Jordan possibly being installed inside the station. He believes a portion of Prospect Avenue could be renamed for him. And Jordan's statue could be moved from its location near 31st Street and Benton Boulevard to the new police campus.

"This is also coming on the heels of the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Leon and my dad were right in the middle of in Kansas City," Watkins said.

His dad, Bruce Watkins Sr., was one of the first two African-American members of the Kansas City Council and a 1979 mayoral candidate.

On Monday, Watkins Jr. and others framed and hung various period photographs as well as political cartoons that first appeared in The Kansas City Star.

Jordan helped found Freedom Inc., a political organization that registered African-American voters, campaigned for candidates and became one of the most important black political groups in Missouri.

“We only had Leon for six glorious years,” said Richard Tolbert, a former Kansas City Council member who praised Jordan’s talent for energizing voters in such large numbers that they could influence election results.

In 2010, Kansas City police reopened Jordan’s murder case at the urging of civil rights activist Alvin Sykes.

The department later released a 900-page report identifying the gunman in Jordan’s killing as an organized crime figure who was shot and killed in 1985. Jackson County prosecutors chose to close the case and not file any charges against any accomplices because so many witnesses were dead.

The Star, which also looked into the killing, revealed that Jordan’s associations with organized crime figures, as well as his apparent disregard for angering them, likely contributed to his death.

Today, community organizations and neighbors of the Green Duck support the idea of honoring Jordan, Watkins said.

“There’s a groundswell of enthusiasm for this,” he said.

To reach Brian Burnes, call 816-234-4120 (tel:816-234-4120) or send email to bburnes@kstar.com (mailto:bburnes@kstar.com).

IN MEMORIAM

A reception to dedicate the display of photographs of Leon Jordan begins at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the Green Duck Lounge and Grill, 2548 Prospect Ave.