



Civil Rights Pioneer in Santa Rosa: Platt Williams

Born in Louisiana and moving to California in 1949, Platt Williams was a Black pioneer and an amazing leader who “put Santa Rosa on the map for the civil rights movement” (Brenda Williams). Although Jim Crow laws and racism seemed like it was only happening further away, specifically in the South, Williams continued to advocate for the equal treatment of Black people and other people of color in support of those in the South and locally. He, along with Gilbert Gray, co-founded Santa Rosa’s Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1953, which is still active today and served as the Chapter’s first president.

As a leader of the Santa Rosa Chapter of the NAACP, Platt Williams led protests to challenge the policies of segregation and unequal treatment of Black people, worked to bring in other distinguished Black activists and continued to support the efforts of the civil rights movement and equal treatment. Along with his activism, he worked at Sears for 36 years, where he worked his way up from being a custodian to the paint department manager. He offered work experience to local youth at Sears and the Sonoma County Fair. After trying out retirement but not liking it, Williams became a campus supervisor at Analy High School, where he made sure to attend extracurricular events, such as games and dances, and kept an eye on the students. Not only was he an activist and local leader, he was a family man and always worked to provide and put his family first.

Noteworthy contributions of his activism include Santa Rosa’s first ever sit-in at the Silver Dollar Seven due to the owner refusing to serve Black people and picketing outside the stores Kress and Woolworth’s to protest segregation in the South, making it the first Sonoma County protest against Jim Crow laws. The NAACP filed a lawsuit on behalf of the “Silver Dollar Seven” which proved to be a small, but crucial step in the right direction toward equal and just treatment. Williams was behind and helped lead very prominent firsts that happened in Sonoma County. His drive, passion, selflessness and contributions have shaped the civil rights movement in Santa Rosa and has brought to light the unequal treatment that has and continues to persist.

This information can be found in columns written by Gaye LeBaron from the 1970s to present.