

NEWS

For Carpenter, 'it's about time'

"I'm Charles Carpenter and I am going to be your next mayor," said Carpenter, shaking the future voter's hand. "I want you to tell your family, your parents, all your uncles to vote for Charles Carpenter."



Charles Carpenter is focused on name recognition. (Photo by Wiley Henry)

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One month after launching his bid to become Mayor of Memphis, attorney Charles Carpenter was busy opening his Whitehaven campaign headquarters when an elementary school student approached with confidence.

"Is this your, ah, campaign, ah, headquarters?" the student asked.

"Yes, it is. I'm Charles Carpenter and I am going to be your next mayor," said Carpenter, shaking the future voter's hand. "I want you to tell your family, your parents, all your uncles to vote for Charles Carpenter."

The student made his way off into a crowd of other school-age children, their parents and guardians and others who turned out for the kick-off that included a school-supply give-a-way.

"I knew that my biggest challenge was going to be name recognition, putting my face and name together, and we are working on that," said Carpenter. "We are taking our campaign directly to the people."

The people, said Carpenter, are telling him "it's about time.... They understand my vision, they're feeling my vision, they feel that it is needed and they are giving me a lot of encouragement."

Carpenter, a graduate of Notre Dame law school and Howard University and an attorney with 31-years of legal experience, is big on encouragement – both giving and receiving it. He started getting it early in and around his childhood home.

He grew up on Jessamine Ave., near the Beale St. office that now anchors his law practice and graduated from Southside High School. He was 15 when Dr. King was killed.

"Living so close to downtown for the first 13 years I was able to walk down to Church Park. I participated in the marches. I looked at all the different activism that was going on and it really helped to shape my thinking."

His parents – now deceased – moved to Memphis from Alabama. Neither graduated from high school. Both were pull-yourself-up-by-your bootstraps people, he said.

One of Carpenter's early influences was Universal Life Insurance Co. and the "men and women in their suits going in and out of there and taking care of business."

Carpenter said his mother wanted to be an attorney "but in the segregated South she didn't have an opportunity to do that....She would just give me so much encouragement."

Carpenter sold newspapers and shined shoes downtown at a place frequented by military personnel who often would encourage him to pursue his dreams outside of Memphis.

He chose Howard University in DC, drawn largely by the activism on campus. He went straight to law school after graduating, taking an offer from Notre Dame.

He returned to Memphis in 1978 and initially had difficulty finding a job. Eventually, he became a litigator, but after several years – and with notable success – he retired from criminal practice, transferring to the civil side.

Upon his return to Memphis, Carpenter had joined Mt. Vernon Baptist church pastored by Rev. James Netters. He met Dr. Willie W. Herenton there.

Carpenter became one of the founders of the local 100 Black Men chapter and Herenton was a member. After Herenton emerged from the People's Convention designed to select a consensus African-American candidate to run for mayor, he approached Carpenter about being his campaign manager.

Herenton made history in 1991, becoming the first African American elected mayor. Some thought Carpenter would join the administration, but Carpenter said he really didn't see himself as a bureaucrat. "At that time, I thought I could help more people if I stayed outside of the administration."

With encouragement from a friend in Detroit, he began to prepare for municipal finance.

Carpenter engineered Herenton's fourth and fifth campaigns, skipping campaigns three and four.

While he gained expertise and built upon his reputation in municipal finance, Carpenter said, "I really wasn't doing a lot of work for the city other than the bond business, which was probably like one deal a year, sometimes it would be two deals per year. Other than that, I am out here working with other clients trying to make a living."

Along the way, he had been encouraged to seek office.

"I never thought a part-time position was realistic," he said. Now his sons are grown, he's been divorced since 2007 and "I can look at being on the inside on a fulltime basis and delivering quality experience and services to benefit the community."

At the headquarters rally, he focused on children and families.

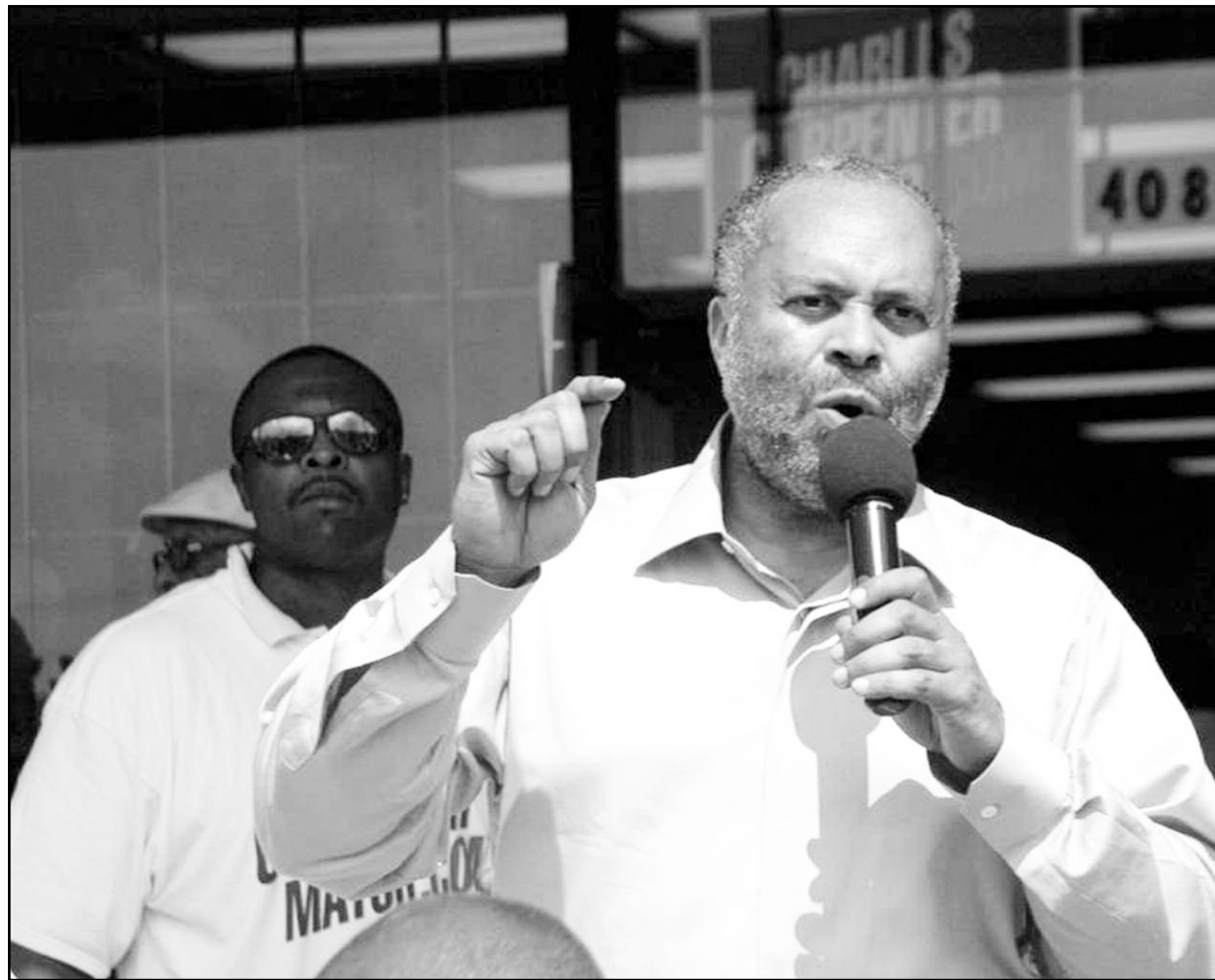
Candidate Carpenter says Mayor Carpenter is going to "do more to help to advance and coordinate education and bring the private sector into our community so that (children) will have hope and understand how through education they can have a place in society."

Sarah Gladney was in the crowd. She's known Carpenter for over 30 years.

"He's a down to earth person. He's a person like you and me and every other citizen," she said. "He's the right person to get the job done."

Getting the job done requires "a new beginning," said Carpenter, including putting more activities for children back in parks, tax equity, a return to community policing, improving police response times and bringing the right people together.

"That's the message to all of Memphis, we are in this together. Whether we are in the front of the boat or the back of the boat, if the boat sinks, we all suffer. We cannot go forward like that."



"They're feeling my vision, they feel that it is needed and they are giving me a lot of encouragement," says Carpenter. (Photo by Tyrone P. Easley)

Carpenter grew up on Jessamine Ave., near the Beale St. office that now anchors his law practice. (Photo by Wiley Henry)



Carpenter talks with a supporter at his Whitehaven headquarters opening. "Whether we are in the front of the boat or the back of the boat, if the boat sinks, we all suffer," is part of Carpenter's message. (Photo by Tyrone P. Easley)