

Remembering A True Advocate: Tyrone Thompson

Tyrone, a native Las Vegan, embraced this community and focused on human and community services for many years. Tyrone's career path, as well as his volunteer commitments, always involved helping the residents of this community. And, as Tyrone once put it, "contributing to the betterment of the community in which I was born and raised can't get any sweeter than that!"

Tyrone's journey toward giving back began after graduation from Northern Arizona University, when he returned to Las Vegas and worked in the City of Las Vegas Municipal Court as a Court Intake Officer. At the age of 21, he landed a job at Nevada State Welfare where he served in various capacities for nine years before moving on to Clark County Government, where he served as a Neighborhood Liaison for Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates. Tyrone was entrusted with many projects that benefited the residents of District D. From there, Tyrone was promoted to Community Outreach Manager for the Parks and Community Services Department, and later transitioned to Clark County Social Service to oversee the Ryan White Title I program, a federally funded program benefiting those infected and affected with HIV/AIDS. In November 2006, Tyrone moved to the City of Las Vegas, to serve as the Neighborhood Planning and Initiatives Manager, where he was responsible for key initiatives adopted by the Mayor, City Council and community at large, to include Homeless, Youth, Seniors, the Faith Based Community, and Volunteers.

In his role with the City of Las Vegas, Tyrone oversaw a staff of dedicated Neighborhood Planners who worked at a grassroots level with neighbors to keep their neighborhoods as clean, vibrant places to live, work, and play. He is also focused on administering the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) designed to help those at-risk of losing their housing due to eviction and/or other circumstances and to help rapidly rehouse those recently becoming homeless and placing them back into housing. Due to the economic downturn in this community, Tyrone encountered many families who are/were in need. Tyrone was also involved in the City of Las Vegas Team to assist with the facilitation of the re-opening of F-Street Project. In April 2011, Tyrone transitioned back to the County, when he became Regional Initiatives Coordinator for Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition, where he was responsible for connecting disconnected youth to education and employment through the Ready for Life Southern Nevada initiative. Tyrone later transitioned to the Clark County Organization Development Center and retired in 2017. Tyrone served as a Nevada Assemblyman since 2013 and over the years chaired several committees, involving Education and Homelessness, and in 2017 was instrumental in the creation of the Nevada Advisory Commission on Mentoring, aimed at strengthening and expanding mentoring organizations in Nevada. Tyrone was one of the community leaders involved in the reorganization of the Las Vegas: My Brother's Keeper Alliance in February 2017 and he served on the National Alumni Board of Northern Arizona University.

But, Tyrone's passion and drive to "give back" to his community went far beyond the jobs which he was paid to do. Tyrone was heavily invested in volunteering with organizations that suited his talents and passions, and ones which he could make a difference. Tyrone served on the DARE Board of Directors, NAACP Reorganizing Committee, served as a mentor for Summer Business Institute youth, and was a 2003 alumnus of the Chamber of Commerce Leadership Las Vegas Program. But there was one organization that was nearest and dearest to Tyrone's heart and soul, when he was not serving as a dedicated usher and greeters at Victory Missionary Baptist Church, under the leadership of Dr. Robert E. Fowler, Sr.,...that organization is called **CASA**, which stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate.

For nearly twenty one years, Tyrone made CASA a part of his life. He donated and volunteered countless hours to this program after taking the Oath of Office. As a CASA volunteer, Tyrone left his footprints and made a difference in the lives of eleven African American adolescents and teenage boys. Tyrone was a great support to the children whom he represented and advocated on their behalf. He taught these young boys to have a sense of pride, and experience unconditional love, which several have come to understand more, after exiting the foster care system and reaching out to him as adults, and introducing their kiddos to him as their CASA "grandbabies". Tyrone once stated that the warm feelings came when children were either reunified with their birth families or were adopted by a loving family. Tyrone understood the values that children can gain when they experience a sense of belonging, as Tyrone indicated that he was blessed to have his father and mother in his life, and he cherished the positive experiences and childhood memories that helped to form the person he became in life. Tyrone believed that giving back meant "you never forget where you came from." That is why he took pride in working on improving the quality of lives in neighborhoods in which he previously lived, played or worshipped, specifically the Historic West Las Vegas community. One of Tyrone's favorite quotes by Margaret Mead was, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Tyrone not only promoted the mission of CASA on a local level, but he also served on the Executive Board of the Nevada CASA Association and in 2017 began networking with the National CASA Association.

Tyrone once mentioned that when he was not working or volunteering for others, he was involved with a number of other pastime hobbies and interests, including wine tasting, and Black Art. Tyrone's signature annual event was the Christmas Pajama Party, which he called *The North Pole in North Las Vegas*. This was a private event that he planned for the children of his family and close friends. Everyone always had a blast!

Before he became an Assemblyman, Tyrone shared a few of his future aspirations that included: writing a book about the lessons learned from his late paternal grandmother, Georgia Mae Thompson; becoming an entrepreneur by opening a greeting card line; and consulting/contracting in various aspects such as life skills, life coaching, and even inspirational speaking engagements. Tyrone's ultimate goal was to eventually serve as an Executive Director for a local non-profit.

FAMILY BIO: Tyrone's family has a rich history in the Historic West Las Vegas Community and other areas of Las Vegas. His paternal grandparents migrated to Las Vegas in the 1950's from a small town in the South known as Epps, Louisiana. His late father, Odis Thompson, was a star basketball player and an original *Runnin' Rebel* as he played on the Nevada Southern University team (now UNLV) in the late 50's. His father served as bartender for over 30 years at Caesar's Palace until he became ill in 2002 and passed away January 2004. His mother, Vertis Austin-Thompson, served as a grocery checker until her retirement in 2002. She worked for a few grocery chains in the community. Besides being beautiful on the inside and out, Tyrone described his mother as very friendly and highly talkative (without a doubt, he stated that he got the highly talkative trait from her). He has one sister, Sonja Marie Mason, whom he shared a close relationship. Tyrone considered himself "blessed" to have many family members, friends, and colleagues.

Tyrone was well respected in this community and he will forever be remembered for the rich legacy which he leaves behind, especially his dedication and passion to making a difference in the lives of children and youth. Tyrone was a selfless and tireless advocate and mentor and one who definitely strived to be the change agent that the world needed to see. Tyrone was not only a member of our local CASA family and a fellow church member, Tyrone was our friend, and he will truly be missed.

**This recently edited article was previously featured in the Summer 2011 CASA Newsletter.*