

[From the Times and Democrat, Jan. 27, 2009]

AUSTIN CUNNINGHAM DIES AT 94
(By Lee Tant)

It is hard, if not impossible, to describe the life of Orangeburg icon Austin Cunningham. Cunningham, who died Monday at the age of 94, was a community leader, businessman, writer, lawyer, soldier and citizen of the year.

He was the definition of a Renaissance man.

His lifetime spanned 18 presidents, 11 recessions, two world wars and the civil rights movement.

Cunningham was the leader of five companies and in 1998 was named Outstanding Elder Citizen of the Year for South Carolina.

A decade later, he was named the Kiwanis Club of Orangeburg's Citizen of the Year. He also was honored with the Order of the Palmetto.

Cunningham was involved with nearly everything in the Orangeburg community. He was constantly willing to be out front in volunteering and promoting community involvement.

During the 1970s, Cunningham made business trips to Denmark and Manning while an executive at the Sunbeam Outdoor Co. It was then he first became interested in Orangeburg. When the company relocated its executive headquarters to Santee in 1974, Cunningham and his family moved with it.

He said his new home was like an "island" because its residents had to drive at least 50 miles to reach Columbia or Charleston.

The man who once called cities such as Chicago and New York home quickly became involved in the community. He joined what was then the Greater Orangeburg Chamber of Commerce, attended First Presbyterian Church, and was active in the local Republican Party.

He retired from Sunbeam to open a Burger King restaurant on John C. Calhoun Drive in 1975.

Cunningham accepted the chairmanship of the Orangeburg Regional Hospital's major gifts division four years later. His work was instrumental in procuring the funding to build the Regional Medical Center.

Cunningham also became a tireless advocate of the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit program during the summer of 1983. The program provided a tax credit for employers who hired underprivileged teenagers.

During that time, Cunningham served as chairman of the local Economic Recovery Committee.

To market the program in Orangeburg, Cunningham illustrated how it not only made good financial sense but also helped the community.

"Your reward is two-fold. You'll get a good worker for jobs you want them to do. And when you go to pay your federal businesses taxes next year, you'll get back 85 percent of what you paid out," he said to encourage local employers.

In the spring of 1984, President Ronald Reagan invited Cunningham to the White House to honor his efforts in promoting the program.

Reagan lauded Cunningham and credited him with fostering partnerships with 77 local businesses that gave 264 jobs to teenagers in poverty.

"For most of these 16- and 17-year-olds, it was their first real job. Now that's partnership in action, and everybody is better off because of it," Reagan said.

A July 1983 T&D editorial described Cunningham as "a one-man crusade" that informed the community about the program's merits. It also noted he was dubbed "Mr. TJTC" by the head of the State Employment Security Commission back then.

However, Cunningham didn't want all the attention and refused to take credit for it.

He insisted the real heroes were the businesses that hired the young workers.

He said the success of the program in Orangeburg boded well for industry and race relations here.

"It's made Orangeburg a better community than it was 10 weeks ago," Cunningham said after the program concluded its first summer.

He served on the People's Assault on Drugs Committee in the 1990s.

Cunningham was also behind getting 132 streetlights installed in New Brookland as part of efforts by the People's Assault on Drugs. He said then that drug dealers were relegated to hanging back in the shadows.

"They can't stand out in the streets anymore. They are not aggressively stopping people and vying with each other," he said.

Additionally, Cunningham was a patron of the arts.

After hearing the South Carolina State University Choir, he realized how good it was and, he spearheaded the choir's partnership with the South Carolina Philharmonic Orchestra. This led to an annual concert series in Orangeburg.

S.C. State awarded him its Distinguished Service Award at the 1995 Founder's Day festivities.

When he was named the "Outstanding Older South Carolinian" of the year by the state Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Aging in 1998, Cunningham used the honor to make a push for funding county councils on aging. The annual Elder Hop event on New Year's Day in Orangeburg was his brainchild as a fundraiser for the Meals on Wheels program.

Born in Washington, he lost his journalist father at age 12. Cunningham went to work in the U.S. Supreme Court as a page at age 14 and subsequently worked under J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. He lost two brothers in the war.

After earning a law degree from the University of Virginia, he did advanced studies at the University of Chicago and Oxford University.

He married his late wife Jacqueline in 1946. An infant son, Paul, died in 1954.

He is survived by two daughters, Manhattan psychotherapist Kathryn Janus (wife of Jeffrey Janus), magazine journalist Amy Cunningham of Brooklyn (wife of Steven Waldman), son Austin Cunningham III, a business owner residing in Swansea, and two school-aged grandsons Joseph and Gordon Waldman of Brooklyn. His younger sister, Mrs. Clotilde Luce, at age 88, still works at New York City's renowned Neighborhood Playhouse School of the Theatre.

As a longtime author of articles for the Times and Democrat and other publications, Cunningham wrote from his vast repertoire of life experiences. He offered insight on historical figures from George Washington and Abe Lincoln to Bill Clinton. He spent a weekend in a state prison, at his own request, gathering material to provide insight on life behind bars.

Most recently, Cunningham was the subject of a story about his experience as an usher on the podium at Franklin Roosevelt's presidential inauguration in 1933.

Also, he was honored this past week by the Orangeburg County Community of Character initiative. The board of directors voted to create the Austin Cunningham Orangeburg County Community of Character award. It will be given once a year to worthy citizens who exemplify the character traits that make their communities better places to live, work and play.

A memorial service for Cunningham will be held at noon Friday at First Presbyterian

Church in Orangeburg. The family will receive visitors from 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at Dukes-Harley Funeral Home.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. GENE GREEN

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Madam Speaker, I would have voted "Aye" on both H. Res. 31 expressing support for the designation of a National Data Privacy Awareness Day, and H. Res. 84, honoring the heroic action of the individuals involved with the rescue effort of U.S. Airways Flight 1549.

Our office holds a twice yearly event, the Paying for College Workshop, to provide high school seniors and their parents options for financing a college education. We invite the Sallie Mae Foundation to join us and they have given out dozens of scholarships over the years. Last night we had over 200 people attend the Workshop at Milby High School in our district, and Sallie Mae provided a \$500 scholarship. We had to schedule the event before the 2009 voting schedule was finalized and for that reason I was not able to be in Washington for the two votes last night.

I would have supported both resolutions that were voted on last night, and was a cosponsor of H. Res. 31. People are increasingly using electronic communications in all walks of life—from social networking to e-commerce, more and more personal information is being compiled by online sites. While we have realized incredible efficiencies and other benefits from new electronic technologies, those technologies have also raised significant challenges for protecting the privacy of personal and proprietary information. H. Res. 31 would designate January 28 as National Data Privacy Day to raise awareness and educate people on safe practices when submitting personal information online.

TRIBUTE TO MIKE SHAIN

HON. JO ANN EMERSON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Mrs. EMERSON. Madam Speaker, there are all kinds of public servants in our communities, but we seldom think first of journalists in that category. In the Eighth Congressional District of Southern Missouri, a journalist springs to mind as a public servant: Mike Shain of KFVS in Cape Girardeau. Mr. Shain is retiring after 53 years in the news businesses (the last 37 at KFVS), and I want to commend him to the U.S. House of Representatives for his long labors in the service of our region, our State and our Nation.

Though the craft of news reporting has changed greatly in the time Mr. Shain has spent in the business, his fair reporting, his work ethic, and his professionalism have remained constant. Everyone who has looked at Mr. Shain over a microphone or across a table on the set of his weekly news magazine knows they have better done their homework. Mr. Shain takes preparedness to another