

Nathaniel "Nate" Lawrence - obituary
"A Well Spent Life in Service to Jazz and the Quad Cities Community"

Nathaniel "Nate" L. Lawrence, born October 27, 1942 in Moline, IL, passed away at age 80 on Tuesday, August 15, 2023 in East Moline, IL.

Upon graduation from United Township High School, East Moline in 1960, Nate enlisted in the army as a medic and served for 3 years in Alaska. He was patriotic and proud of his time in the military. After his military service he enrolled at Western Illinois University, in Macomb, IL. In 1964 he founded the first black student organization on the WIU campus. After graduation from WIU in 1967, Nate owned and managed a telemarketing business in Bettendorf, IA, and he became a dedicated community activist in the Quad Cities.

Nate was a gem of a longtime friend and divine nurturer of the arts and the Quad Cities communities. He was on the board of the Mississippi Valley Blues Society in Davenport, IA, and he served as the educational committee chairperson. In the 1980s/1990s he accompanied me on many of my in/school music educational presentations as MC/facilitator. We had many interesting and edifying cultural/social/political chats over our many shared lunch breaks.

Nate was a primary force in the founding of the jazz scene in the Quad Cities far beyond the longtime local interest in famous jazz icon and Davenport native Leon "Bix" Beiderbecke. Nate was very active in the National Jazz Education Network and faithfully attended and contributed to the organization's annual conventions. He established jazz education programs for all ages at the River Music Experience Museum in Davenport, IA, and he created and enabled many jazz music programs for all levels of the public schools in the Quad Cities. He founded the popular Polyrythms jazz concert series and the Bill Bell/Polyrythms Jazz Festival in Rock Island, IL. Nate passed away on the Wednesday before this year's August weekend Bill Bell/Polyrythms Jazz Festival. The 2023 event was dedicated to his memory.

He spent many years of selfless service to the arts and all positive aspects of inclusiveness and benefitting the black community. His deep influence and impact on the arts and politics in the Quad Cities was/is immeasurable and lasting. Though he was proud of his accomplishments, he was soft-spoken and humble, not one to speak about himself, only interested in using his voice and smile in serving the many worthwhile activities he either created or was involved in.

I remember him saying years ago:

"In the past, I thought you needed to picket in the street to make change. Now I make appointments, to meet one-on-one, with a smile, with the people that are the change-makers."

An activist for the black community in many arenas, he took it upon himself to meet regularly with the editors of the Quad Cities newspapers acting as a volunteer

representative/liaison to inform journalists where the black community stood on a variety of cultural/social/political issues and to provide news stories on the activities in the black community with emphasis on music and the arts. He was often featured in Quad Cities news media for being the founder of the “Mayors Commission.” He collaborated with the Mayors of Rock Island, Moline, East Moline, and Davenport as a liaison between the black residents and the mayors to benefit the community. He was the voice of the black community to the mayors. Nate met with the mayors monthly for breakfast in a quiet corner of a local restaurant. He would greet them with a smile and present his ideas of how to improve and to mend fences. He was honest, open-minded, and created a working-together attitude.

Nate Lawrence was an enthusiastic, passionate, tireless, and successful advocate for the arts and the black community. A thoughtful, wise, kind, and gentle-man.

Shellie Moore-Guy: former Quad Cities Poet Laureate memorialized Nate Lawrence with the following:

Nate Lawrence was the walking, living and breathing representation of a community servant and leader.

Nate’s had and embraced an unwavering commitment to community and the belief that art, self-expression, music and the people who create, can uplift and change lives, no matter the age. He created a program called The Jazz and Blues Restoration Project and brought in musicians who were born in the Quad Cities. He believed that this music has the power to restore, and that children need to see and engage with artists who come from where they come from, who had made it to the top of their field.

I have heard it stated that “there will never be another Nate Lawrence,” and while that is certainly true, we should remember that Nate’s tireless efforts are important because he emphatically believed we all have the capacity to contribute, change lives and restore hope. He led us all by example. The road map has been laid and though the work can feel daunting, thankless at times, and never-ending, the work is necessary. We are making a difference.

There is the greater good.

 They Can’t Take That Away From Me...

“How he will be missed.”

Rest In Peace and Power - Nathaniel “Nate” Lawrence
May your memory and immeasurable good works be forever blessings to your family, your many friends, and the community you served so well.

- Michael “Hawkeye” Herman - 9/1/23

<http://www.HawkeyeHerman.com>