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DAKOTA IMAGES

In his acceptance speech as grand master of the South Dakota International Order of Odd Fellows in 1998, Theodore R. ("Ted") Blakey stated his motto: "Together we can make it happen." Blakey's belief in cooperation led him to success in many endeavors.

Theodore Robert Blakey was born in Yankton on 31 August 1925, the youngest of Henry and Mary Fristoe Blakey's eleven children. He completed the eighth grade at Grove Elementary School in 1940 and in 1967 passed the general educational development test, earning the equivalent of a high-school diploma. On 22 October 1948, he married Dorothy Edwards in Athabaska, Alberta, Canada, and the couple had three children. Dorothy Blakey died in 1981. In 1991, Ted Blakey married Chessie Wheeler.

Blakey learned to operate a business by working on his family's truck farm. In 1956, he opened Blakey's Janitor Service, adding a pest-control business in 1968. In 1975, he established Ted Blakey Bail Bonds.

In addition to his business activities, Blakey participated in many service organizations. In 1965, he became the first African American to be named a Junior Chamber ("Jaycee") International senator. In the early 1970s, he was one of the first two African-American men to lead a local Kiwanis chapter. With his installation as grand master of the South Dakota International Order of Odd Fellows in 1998, he became the first African-American man in the nation to lead a state lodge. He was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame in 1997.

Blakey was also active in politics. In 1963, Governor Archie Gubbrud appointed him commissioner of the state Emancipation Proclamation Committee, formed to work for passage of a constitutional amendment eliminating the poll tax. South Dakota lawmakers approved the legislation, and the Twenty-fourth Amendment was ratified in 1964.

An active Republican, Blakey served as a delegate to three national and eleven state Republican conventions. He made the acquaintance of every South Dakota governor, beginning with Leslie Jensen in 1938, as well as President Ronald Reagan.

Blakey was a lifelong member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Yankton. Built in 1885, the Allen Chapel had gradually fallen into disrepair. Beginning in the 1980s, Blakey spearheaded efforts to ensure preservation of the building and the history of African Americans in the Upper Midwest.

Ted Blakey died 14 October 2004 at the age of seventy-nine, leaving a legacy of community involvement and racial tolerance.

—Patricia A. Edman

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Theodore R. ("Ted") Blakey

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