

William E. "Bunny" Davis (1917 - 2001)

The grandson of former North Carolina slaves, William "Bunny" Davis was born in Perryville, Kentucky. Throughout his life, Davis broke many racial barriers, and achieved great success as a leader in sports, business, and government. Davis's talent in sports became apparent while he was a student at Old Bate high school in Danville Kentucky, where he graduated in 1936. He excelled in basketball, football and baseball.

In basketball, Davis gained a national ranking as a star forward. He was all state and was selected to play on the All-American Negro High School Basketball Team in 1936. For his achievements, Davis was inducted into the Kentucky High School Athletic Association Sports Hall of Fame in March 1991. Davis earned the nickname, "Bunny," because of his running and dodging abilities on the football field and for running the 100-yard dash in 9.7 seconds.

Davis not only excelled in baseball, he also broke racial barriers. He played semi-professional baseball in 1945 before the game was integrated. Later, in 1947 he joined the Lexington Hustlers, the first integrated baseball team in the South. As a semi-professional baseball player in the 1940's, Davis played against baseball legends Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, Satchel Paige and Roy Campanella. Davis became the first black man to umpire baseball games in the Kentucky Southeastern Conference and the Kentucky state high school tournament in 1969.

Davis became a community-oriented professional and founded Bunny's Moving and Service, a moving van company. Davis began his community service after retiring in 1982. He became the first black businessman to break racial barriers by serving on several local boards in Danville, including Ephraim-McDowell hospital, Danville United Way, Danville Selective Service, Danville Kiwanis Club, Danville Police and Firefighter's Merit Board and Danville-Boyle County of Chamber of Commerce.

In 1992, Davis became mayor pro-tem of Danville, making him the first black person to hold a high government position in the city. He held that office for five terms. Davis also served on the Danville City Commission for 13 years.

William "Bunny" Davis may be most widely remembered by the people of Kentucky for his faithful service as the doorkeeper for the Kentucky House of Representatives, an office he held for 28 years. For 15 of those years, he served as the chief doorkeeper and was responsible for a staff of 15. Davis' notable role was to ceremoniously present, to the house speaker and members, important guests and visitors who were then escorted by staff onto the House floor. William "Bunny" Davis died in 2001. He was 84 years old.

