

Introductory Comments
Re James O. Gibson
At
The Third Annual Awards Ceremony
For
“Livable Communities Leadership.”

February 23, 2006
Busboys & poets
14th & v sts. Nw

I am Skip Mckoy from the Anacostia Waterfront Corporation; but i am here tonight as a regional citizen and a friend of Jim Gibson. It is truly an honor to be part of a tribute for Jim, a truly regional citizen who has worked for ways to accommodate growth while enhancing social equity. Thank you Cheryl Cort, Janet Brown, and Chairman Steve Jones for inviting me.

To any Gibsons present --Kathy, Julie and Maurice Howard [Carl, Tammy, Jan, spouses, and grandchildren]-- please, forgive any roasted tid bits that may creep into these remarks.

Jim Gibson has maintained a harmonic interest in the blending of design, historic preservation, urban development, environmental sanity and regional solutions to housing and job inequities. For some, adding Jim’s interests in the arts, civil rights, youth & families and the homeless create a cacohpany too diverse to absorb; while for others, these are fascinating themes which compose and drive the wonderful complexity of Jim.

I met Jim in 1979 when we agreed to partner on a great urban adventure in planning for the nation's capitol. Since that time, he's had occasion to fill me in on what i had missed as he was cutting an activist swath through the south, making his way up to and through D.C.

So, the reason Jim looks a tad bit older than he did in Atlanta as a twenty-something executive secretary of the NAACP is because he is. No, actually it's because he's applied his agile mind to so many diverse challenges:

- Civil rights and race relations at NAACP and Potomac Institute in Washington
- Historic preservation and affordable housing as Assistant City Administrator, Wash. DC
- Dance, music, The Ellington School of the Arts, The Bicentennial Commission, and Meyer Foundation
- National poverty and equitable development at Rockefeller Foundation [Nyc] and Policy Link [Oakland]
- Social research and sociology of family networks at Urban Institute, CSSP, and A.E. Casey Foundation
- Restoration of fiscal, social and economic vigor and integrity to the region's core at DC Agenda and A Greater Washington
- Support for the homeless at The Community Partnership
- And the list goes on, and on, and on

When Jim approaches a problem, this collage of interests, skills and passions will most surely result in a coordinated and eloquent solution. But solutions are not developed without aggravation or effort.

I recall one evening when we were both working towards midnight, and he was approaching the final, or maybe the ultimate, perhaps conclusive and surely the definitive draft for an important address. Jim looked up wearily from his legal pad and complained, “you know, these folks think innovative ideas and concepts flow effortlessly—that i just step behind a microphone, clear my throat, reach down an octave, and cogent notions pour out without forethought or preparation.”

Now, i know Jim. And, i know that he wrestles with and works hard to find the most effective way to place each syllable in an oration ---almost as much as he labors to find pragmatic answers to the maladies of persistent poverty.

In some ways, the excitement of being exposed to Jim’s leadership is imbedded in the experience of searching for imperfect answers while meeting impossible deadlines. It’s the exhilaration of “building the airplane as you are still flying.”

But, enough about his dedication, brilliance and eloquence. There are some stark and serious truths about Jim Gibson’s leadership.

He is intensely committed, relentlessly probing, unabashedly direct, yet shrewdly, or as he would say , strategically political and ultimately pragmatic in pursuit of opportunities for others. He is not always agreeable. And sometimes, Jim certainly can be pain in the

[you pick the body part]. When you argue with Jim you'd best bring your "a-game," your best analysis and quickest retorts to the table.

Jim is always directing and his "script" for the Washington region would, I dare say, be filled with dance, song, painting, poetry, mysteries, proud grandparents, and joyous children moving about on a metropolitan stage. It is all performed by actors reflecting the many ethnic and cultural persuasions extant in this great metropolis. The plot is challenging and there is indeed suffering. But in the end, justice prevails and the audience has traversed the divide between stage, orchestra and balcony. We all feel part of the drama and weep for joy, while applauding for encore after encore.

What Jim has done for the greater Washington region, as well as for this nation, with artistic recognition of the 200 year celebration; with programs and dollars for the urban and rural poor; with strategies for change in civil rights and in mixed income communities; with challenges to the institutions and conventions of the status quo; and with scholarly analysis or bare knuckled calls to action—he has done with passion, with style, with impact, and with love.

And, therefore, tonight Jim, we honor you and return, in some modest proportion, some of that love you have so generously given.