

FEATURED

A 'Juicy' 100th birthday

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Albert "Juicy" Carter (center) applauds at remarks being made during his 100th birthday celebration on Aug. 31 at the Kershaw County Parks and Recreation Department. Applauding with him are (from left) his daughter-in-law, Jackie Carter; son, Albert Wendell Carter Sr.; and daughter, Yvonne Robinson.

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A large crowd gathered inside the Kershaw County Department of Parks and Recreation's headquarters on Aug. 31 to be on hand for a 100th birthday celebration in honor of Albert "Juicy" Carter. With a few exceptions, almost everyone could claim a family connection — either directly or by marriage — to Carter. Children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, their children and more filled the room as a deejay played music ranging from the Big Band and swing eras to Motown.



Picking up the nickname “Juicy” from Juicy Fruit gum, Carter was born in Camden’s St. Matthew community in 1924 and moved to New York in the 1940s. He has since returned home, currently residing at The Legacy of Camden. His niece, Wanda Braxton, presided over the festivities.

“There’s a saying that says, ‘age is nothing but a number,’ but that really depends on which number you are talking about, whether it’s for a good cause or a bad reason and which can range from one digit to two digits to three digits,” Braxton said. “We have gathered here today to celebrate that today to celebrate one who is in the lowest, which is the three digits.”

She then asked for people of different ages to raise their hands depending on how years they had been alive, starting in the 20s. More and more people started raising their hands as she made her way up to people in their 50s, 60s, and 70s, until reaching one person in their 90s, and, of course, Carter at 100.

“In the Bible, we read that there were years of ages that were very, very long. For example, in Genesis, chapters 5 and 5, we have the generations of Adam. At 130 years of age, Adam had a son. So, Uncle Albert, you’ve still got a little time,” Braxton joked.

The Rev. Jerri Dicks of St. Matthew United Methodist Church gave the invocation, while one of Carter’s nephews, the Rev. George Carter read some scripture, followed by another nephew, the Rev. John Carter giving some reflections.

John Carter remarked on the year that Juicy’s father, whom he called Pa Pa, passed away in 1975.

“Only 15.7 (%) of all Black men lived beyond 65 years old,” he pointed out. “But, more importantly, in the year 2000, based on the Census, only one in 20 lived to be past 90. Y’all hear what I’m saying to you? When God gives creation to you, he’s already pulled your number. He knows when he wants you to be coming to the world and when he’s going to take you out. The Lord has given you a great, great blessing.

“I want to remind you all that when Juicy was a young man in New York — I lived in Washington (D.C.), so I didn’t know about this — but a little birdie told me that when Juicy walked into a party, it was ready



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to get started.”

John Carter said there were seven aunts and an uncle living in New York at the same time at one point, and they would go from house to house to attend parties.

“They would sit around and talk about my grandma and granddaddy and these things, but when he walked in, oh man, it was time to get started then. So, you’re not done,” he declared, pointing at his uncle. “You’re just getting started. The world needs you now. There’s so much drudgery and depression everyday in the news. You’re needed.”

Recalling a time when a family member left him to go shopping with an admonishment to stay put, John Carter said he didn’t do that, going up and down a main street where he wasn’t recognized. When asked who he was, he said he was Nathan and Grace Carter’s son, they said he said was all right.

“You got a great name, Juicy; we had a grandfather who just off of slavery took some land and made good. He took his wife and two boys and as poor as they were, they made good on the little bit they had. The Carter name — we don’t have to be proud, because the Bible tells us pride leads to arrogance, but we are to be proud in the sense that God has blessed us, gave us something magnificent,” John Carter said.

He asked Juicy how many times he had ever been in the hospital. The answer was only two or three in his 100 years of life and has never had surgery.

“I think I was there two or three times last week,” John Carter quipped.

Along the way, he said, Juicy lost his beloved wife, Ruth, but left his daughters, Wendy and Yvonne.

Several people then came up to make remarks, including:

- Napoleon Brown, a nephew from Wichita Falls, Texas, who joked that he chose flying to Camden over the 16-hour drive, and recalled the car that brought him and his brother from New York to Camden

when they were kids was the same one Juicy used to move to New York in the 1940s.

- Walter Brown, another nephew who recently turned 80, from Bowie, Md., who said that his uncle was almost like a father to him and that when he visited New York City, the Carter home was his home — that Juicy and Ruth treated him and his brother like their own children. He said he felt he could have communicated more with his uncle when he was younger, but that he has felt like he has been making up for it during the last five years. Walter Brown also joked that he hoped Juicy would live another 25 years. “Another 100 is kind of unrealistic, but 25 may be in the ball park!”

- Mona Gamble, a grandniece from New York, read out a number of Bible verses, including one guarantees life to 70, so she was grateful for the extra 30 years of Juicy’s life so far. She said she has had “countless conversations” with Carter that left her a better person. She recounted a story about how Juicy asked her father — who, she said, was not a rule-follower — to take care of some fish while he and Ruth were on vacation only to come home to find them all dead. “You knew who you were dealing with,” Gamble told Carter, who added that Juicy was a “phenomenal” dancer, who also took great care of his siblings, especially his siblings.

- April Caruso, of The Legacy of Camden where Carter now resides, said she has only known him for about eight months. She said early on, she and the staff heard yelling coming from his room and thought there was a problem. It turned out he was watching a baseball game. Caruso added that she has come to love hearing his laughter as well because he does so without abandon. “There’s a quote, schoolteachers use this, but I think it is very fitting in this instance. It says, ‘100 years from now, it won’t matter what kind of car I drove, what kind of house I lived in, how much money I had in my bank, what my clothes looked like, but it will matter that I was important in the life of one child.’ Mr. Carter, look around this room and all of these lives that you have touched.”

- Ted McCollum, Carter’s former supervisor in New York who is currently living in Georgia, said he first met Carter in 1988 while working for the New York City Board of Education and assigned as custodial engineer at Public School (P.S.) 108 in Manhattan. Carter worked there for more than 30 years, maintaining the grounds in

“pristine condition.” So well, McCollum said, that P.S. 108 was known as the best maintained school building in Manhattan. They worked together for 10 years until Carter retired in 1979 at the age of 73.

“Knowing what I know now of Al’s longevity ... what I should have said to Al was, ‘You’re too young to retire; you’re only 73 years old. You’re a young man, at the prime of your life.’ He called Carter his mentor, one of his best friends, and someone who’s high standard he tried to meet.

After all of these statements, including a few words from long-time friend Joseph Deas, Carter’s grandson, Albert W. Carter Jr., played *Amazing Grace* on saxophone.

Braxton and another niece, Terry Ballard, brought Carter up front to accept a plaque recognizing his birthday as “100 years,” “36,500 days” and “876,000 hours” and “52 million, 560 thousand minutes.” Ballard said she and Braxton moved to New York in the 1970s and stayed at the Carter home almost every weekend. The three things she said she remembered growing up were that her uncle was “always a sharp dresser,” kept a good car, and made sure you “didn’t mess with his fish.”

Braxton recalled that Carter had actually baby-sat her 72 years ago, even changing her diaper, and that she was “really floored” by learning that she had even slept in the same bed as him as a child. As they got older, the conversations deepened, becoming more meaningful, she said.

Carter himself said a few words.

“The greatest thing I ever did was sing, but my voice is gone. I have a friend, and I want to give him thanks,” he said, and paused for a moment, then continued, “Mr. McCollum, thank you and your wife for coming out, (for) treat(ing) me as a man. You are a man, a gentleman and everything. You are very, very good. And thank you everybody else. I’m not feeling too good, but I thank each and every one of you for coming out here today.”

Afterward, several grandchildren and great-grandchildren came up to make some remarks, who all said that he has been — and that they know he always will be — there for them.

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