



Photo by JIM BALL

Virginia Taylor stood outside her 'Little City Hall' storefront office.

VIRGINIA TAYLOR

Leader's a selfless booster for black community

By SANDY NELSON
The News Tribune

As a Republican, Virginia Taylor is a bit of an anomaly in the black community. Even though the 48-year-old publisher takes a lot of ribbing for supporting a party that black voters overwhelmingly rejected in the last presidential election, Taylor is nonchalant about being a political minority.

"I have a right to be a Republican," said Taylor, who publishes *The Northwest Dispatch* — one of the city's two newspapers oriented to the black community — along with her business partner, Jean Watley.

It was the Nixon Administration's push for "black capitalism" and the Republican philosophy of individual rights that attracted Taylor to the party during her college days at the University of California at Berkeley in the late '50s and early '60s. But it was the party's willingness to build Taylor's leadership that kept her in its ranks.

"I like the reception they've given me over the years," said Taylor, who has served as GOP 27th District leader for 10 years. "They utilize my skills. I'm able to function in the decision-making processes of the party."

Even her late husband, Cutine, a devoted Democrat, couldn't budge Taylor from her

political convictions. But Taylor's loyalty isn't absolute.

"I'm a middle-of-the-roader, a moderate," she said. "If one of the extreme-right people is the party's candidate for president, I'll leave the party. If they (ultra-conservatives) want to take the party, they can have it. I'm not interested in going back to slavery or having a state run by a church, any church."

Taylor predicts, in fact, that American voters will be choosing candidates from many more than two parties within a few years.

"If something doesn't happen by 1988, we'll probably have a third party, or many parties," she said.

Ever since she moved to Tacoma from San Francisco in 1968, Taylor's face has been a familiar one in city politics.

When welfare recipients organized in the early '70s to protest proposed cutbacks in the foodstamp program, Taylor testified on their behalf at hearings in Washington, D.C.

When the Boys Club was looking for a new home in Tacoma in the early '70s, Taylor helped organize community support for its current site at South 17th Street.

And when business people and community leaders started talking about how to revitalize the Hilltop neighborhood, Taylor was among them.

Besides helping revive the K Street Boosters club, Taylor and her colleagues renamed the community Upper Tacoma to reflect its break with the past. They formed the Upper Tacoma Renaissance Association to make that change more than cosmetic.

So far, the group has convinced The Evergreen State College's Tacoma branch to move to K Street, and City University's Masters Program to set up shop at the Al Davies Boys Club, Taylor said.

"In order to revitalize the community, we need (multiple-family) housing," she said. "We need a mix of people. We need some people with money, some of the yuppies and more affluent people to come up here."

Taylor puts her own money where her mouth is. She has invested heavily and personally in her vision of a revitalized neighborhood, sometimes at great personal loss.

Besides publishing the *Northwest Dispatch*, Taylor tried her hand as part-owner of Celebrity Kitchen, a restaurant that specialized in Southern cooking. The restaurant closed in June after one year of operation.

A social worker by training, Taylor entered the

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Virginia Taylor

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newspaper business about six years ago writing a column and editing copy for the *Tacoma Facts*, Tacoma's other black-owned newspaper. A year later, Taylor met Watley, who had just moved to town and wanted to start a newspaper.

The chemistry was right, and the two women embarked on a business partnership that Watley says compares only with marriage.

"We have to be close when it's uncomfortable and when it's comfortable," Watley said. "We don't think like the average people. She's a risk-taker and so am I. We do things that reason dictates you don't do. But if we functioned off reason, we wouldn't have the newspaper in the first place."

Both women envisioned a newspaper that would serve the Hilltop community in all its racial and political diversity.

"The news is oriented to what's happening in

black America, because a lot of what affects blacks affects whites too," Taylor said. "Most of our articles are designed to inform or help blacks, the poor and the disenfranchised."

Being a publisher gives her the power to influence public opinion in the black community, and Taylor uses that power judiciously.

"I play a leadership role when I have to," Taylor said. With the current controversy over the recent shooting of a black man by five white police officers, Taylor said she felt compelled to take a cautious stance "until we have something to say."

Taylor is concerned that the shooting of Henry Burley will erode the work she and other Hilltop residents have done to improve relations between the Tacoma Police Department and the community.

"We've been up here two years trying to change the Hilltop's image, to get more police protection,"

she said. "Is this what it means? Is more response overkill? Maybe we don't want more police protection. One thing we have to do is address the issue of deadly force and define what is 'life-threatening.'" **AUG 31 1986 TNT**

Because her *Northwest Dispatch* office is such an information center for the community, traffic there often gets heavy.

So Taylor and Watley opened an office half a block from the newspaper and called it "Little City Hall," appointing themselves mayor and city manager, respectively. Taylor hopes politicians and officials will volunteer time at Little City Hall to answer questions from the community.

Such projects typify Taylor's optimism and willingness to take risks. But the entrepreneurial spirit of many black people doesn't inspire investors to take the same risk, she said.

"You can't get capital" to expand, she said. "Just when a business is getting to the point where it could make a profit, you're in debt. Every now and then I get the bug to get a job to supplement this, but it does pay for itself — now."

Taylor's coolheadedness and selflessness amidst crisis are part of her down-to-earth nature, according to those who know her best.

"She's always been a good friend and an active leader in the women's community," said Judy Fortier, director of the Women's Division of the city Human Rights Department. "She's assisted many women in gaining their rights, and she's done it at her own sacrifice."

People "don't realize from the surface that she's struggling," Watley said of her partner. "It's part of her approach to problems. There are always going to be problems, and she tries to resolve those she can."