

City Boy

JULIE EDGAR SENIOR WRITER

Nate Shapiro is where he's always been: Behind a stout desk in a comfortably musty office crammed with trophies and plaques, among them a Humanitarian of the Year award presented to him by Coretta Scott King in 1992.

At 78, coming to work every day at his engineering firm on Wyoming in northwest Detroit is less an economic necessity than an expression of his devotion to the city of his birth.

Shapiro and his family left Detroit in 1965, but he never relocated Consulting Engineering out of the city.

"I felt it wouldn't be right to move the business out," he explained. "Look, I was born here, my family was raised here. The city's been good to me."

Shapiro, a graduate of Cass Tech High, put himself through Wayne University by running an elevator for the city on the midnight shift. He founded Consulting Engineering 45 years ago, and boasts that during the riots, not one of its windows was broken. "I've been successful in the city. I put all my kids through University of Michigan. Most of my good friends in the city are black because I grew up with them," he said.

He recalls a time when blacks and Jews in Detroit relied on each other. Jewish store owners were often the only merchants who would employ blacks at their stores, and in a few cases, helped their workers get to college.

"[The workers] didn't make a lot of money, but neither did these merchants. They worked long and hard. What has happened over the years is that a lot of people have come to the point where there's a real anti-Semitism in the black community and real sentiments against blacks in the Jewish community," Shapiro said.

He believes that black-Jewish relations are "turning around," and points to a few hopeful developments. Temple Shir Shalom and Temple Israel are forging links with Detroit churches, and last fall, NAACP head Wendell Anthony brought in an Israeli girls' choir to his church and housed them with congregants.

"I know there's a lot Jews investing in the city, but I don't believe [blacks] realize who is doing the investing," Shapiro said.

Shapiro himself has met with congressional lawmakers, including U.S. Reps. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and John Conyers, Jr., to discuss U.S.-Israel relations, and claims that his consultations with former U.S. Representative Barbara Rose-Collins resulted in her perfect pro-Israel voting record.

Shapiro holds the distinction of being the only white member on the board of the Detroit chapter of the NAACP, a position he's held

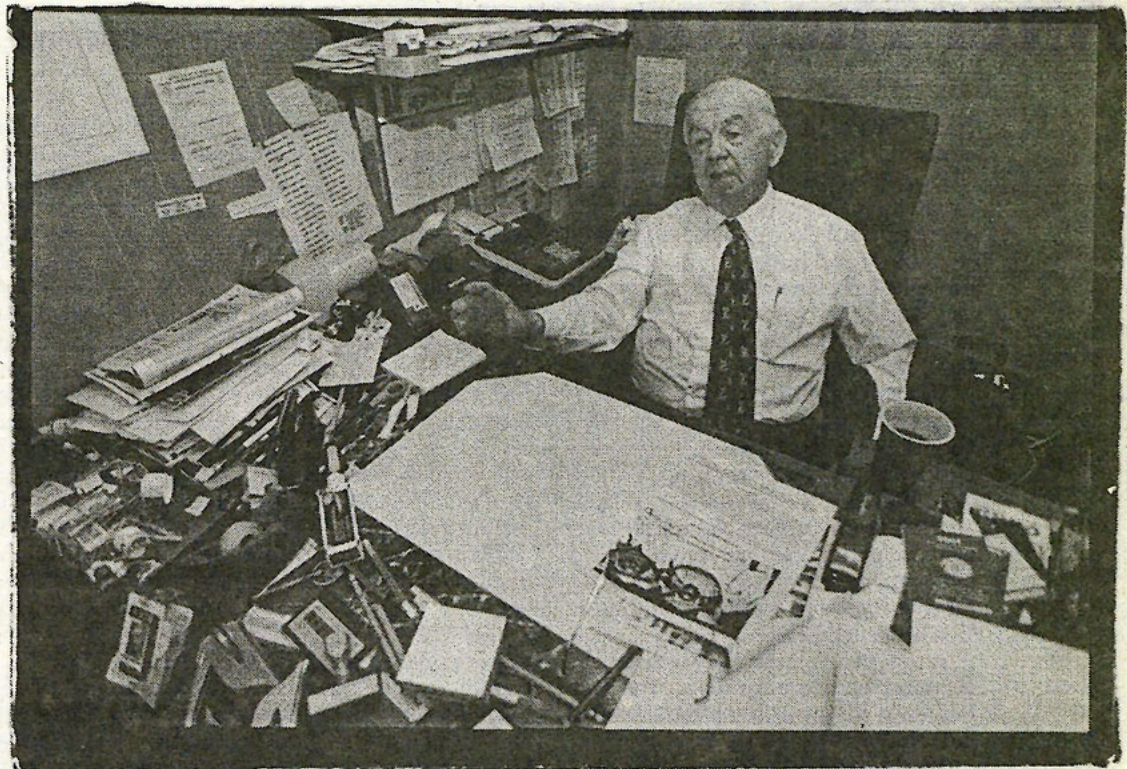
for a dozen years, and serves on the board of the Museum of African American History, to which he was appointed by former Mayor Coleman Young and Mayor Dennis Archer.

He's been the recipient of dozens of awards, including the Imani award from the Greater Detroit Islamic Alliance and New Detroit, Inc. last year.

When he accepts an accolade, he always mentions that he is Jewish and that "Judaism teaches you if you save the life of one person, you've saved the world," Shapiro said.

Yet, he added, "I don't represent the Jewish community. I represent a Jew."

He takes great pride in the fact that half his employees are minority, that he's put 100 Detroit high school graduates through college and that Consulting Engineering has a good track record in awarding minority contracts.



Nate Shapiro is a Detroit loyalist.

Shapiro's involvement in civil rights struggles is notable. During the Bush Administration, he was the only white person on a bus bound for a march on Washington. A young man on the bus asked him why he was there and Shapiro explained that "I was there and would be there if anyone is persecuted." □

The Synagogue-Temple Link

JULIE WIENER STAFF WRITER

A few weeks ago, Reverend Virgil Humes experienced a feeling of dejavu when he saw National Guard troops in the streets of Detroit.

This time they were clearing debris from the July 2 storm in a coordinated event of assistance. But last time it was July 1967, and they were quelling civil disturbances in a charged situation akin to military rule.

"I remember the tanks and curfews," said Reverend Humes, an African-American who was only seven years old the first time he encountered the National Guard in his city. "It was certainly a horrible sight to witness."

Now the pastor of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Wayne, Reverend Humes is optimistic about the changes happening in Detroit. He sees groups coming together in a way he hasn't witnessed before, and is participating in joint projects with a number of other religious institutions in the region, including Temple Israel.

He attributes the heightened optimism — in both the black and white communities — to the current political and religious leadership around Detroit, which he feels has become less splintered in the past few years.

The relationship with Temple Israel began a year ago, shortly after New Hope

was vandalized by a member of a hate group. In response to the vandalism, Reverend Humes called a summit for various community leaders, inviting the Jewish Community Council. With JCCouncil playing matchmaker, Temple Israel invited New Hope's congregants to attend Shabbat services last August. Reverend Humes delivered a sermon, and the church choir sang. Plans are now in the works for Temple Israel to attend New Hope services and for one of the temple's rabbis to speak there.

Reverend Humes sees the visits as an opportunity to break down barriers. "If we show the community that there's a unified front, then that's one less barrier to break down," he said.

But the relationship goes beyond special programs. Members of the two institutions occasionally consult with each other, sharing advice over organizational issues.

For Dr. Nancy Gad-Harf, Temple Israel's director of programming, the most helpful part of the relationship is that it keeps doors open. In recent years, the temple has established relationships with several black churches, both in Detroit and the suburbs.

"We've found we're able to call each other when we need each other," she said. "Having contacts has been wonderful

for both folks...if there is any improvement [in black-Jewish relations] it will be because of these grassroots relationships."

While Reverend Humes concedes that black-Jewish relations face challenges, he does not agree with many black leaders in the city who see the Jewish community's move to the suburbs as an obstacle. Himself a resident of Plymouth, he points out that many middle-class blacks — as well as whites — left the city in search of better schools and real estate. However, he urges the Jewish community to stop moving to new suburbs and to welcome blacks into their neighborhoods.

"Certainly if we were in a heterogenous community living together, relations might be better. The fact that we're separated geographically is a hindrance, but hopefully that can be overcome," he said.

Like many black leaders, Reverend Humes feels that Louis Farrakhan's importance has been overblown by the media, needlessly dividing blacks and Jews.

"Farrakhan is not my leader," he said. "Some things he says may be accurate, but he doesn't prescribe to my vision. As far as my trying to forge relations with the Jewish community, I'm very optimistic. I think I can create a positive relationship with anyone that doesn't disrespect me because of my race or religion." □