

# Leadership Lee 1988

## Team Members

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We want to offer our special thank you to the following for their time, effort and sincere willingness to assist the team members with this project: Rob Avent, Susan Bucy, E. L. "Jinx" Joyner, Mem Leake, Eugene Murphey, John Osberg, Perrin Purvis, Jack Reed, Sr., Joe Washington, WTVA-Production Department.

We also want to express our gratitude to Mr. Julius Berry for his many contributions to Lee County. The preparation of this legacy has been very enjoyable.

**NAME:** Julius "Gus" Garnett Berry

**BORN:** October 12, 1907, Noxapater, Mississippi

**DIED:** November 7, 1966, Tupelo, Mississippi

**SCHOOL:** Bachelor of Arts-Washington and Lee University, 1929,  
Major- Journalism

**WORK:** Owner-Tupelo Insurance Agency (started by his father)

**MILITARY:** Noncommissioned Officer, U.S. Army-World  
War II (European Theatre)

**MARRIED:** 1954 to the former Emily S. Wallace Avent

**ORGANIZATIONS:** President - Tupelo Chamber of Commerce  
Temporary Chairman during transition to CDF  
Chairman-CDF Industrial Committee  
Leading figure in organization of Lee United Neighbors  
President - Rotary Club  
President - Mississippi Association of Insurance Agents  
Active Member - Mississippi Economic Council  
Active Member - Mississippi Manufacturers Association

## Julius Garnett Berry *"A Renaissance Man"*

To be selected for a Leadership Lee Legacy project, you must be unique. Julius Berry was certainly that. The men and women that have been studied in the Legacy projects have found a way to rise above the crowd and take on a leadership role in the Lee County area. Their contributions are so exemplary that today's leaders want to use their life as a learning tool for the future.

Our goal as a project team was to learn as much about Julius Berry as we could. Through that process we can learn something of what it takes to rise as a leader in our community; one man's ingredients for success, if you will.

Through this process, we hope to find ways to better our selves by setting goals that will guide our own lives as future leaders.

As we have put different pieces of Julius Berry's life together, some qualities have become apparent as essential to his success:

- An open mind
- A sense of humor
- A commitment to the welfare of the underprivileged
- The desire to leave his part of the world better than he found it
- A "never give up" attitude
- The courage to take stands that were not popular

The most important quality, however, is the desire to get involved. Without this desire, you cannot effectively help anyone.

Julius Berry got involved. From duck hunting to race relations, from insurance to The United Way, from real estate development to community development, he got involved. Through it all, he never lost sight of his goal; to make Lee County a better place to live.

Our group was charged with presenting his life at a public meeting in a way that would give other people a feel for the life of a great civic leader...to give the public a better understanding of how Lee County got where it is today...its Legacy of Success.

We want to bring Julius Berry to you through the eyes of his close friends and allies—people who have gained respect from the community in their own right and by admission certainly were affected by the life of Julius Berry.

The people involved are:

**JACK REED, SR.**-President of R. W. Reed Company. Mr. Reed worked for many years with Julius Berry in the community service area, through such groups as The United Way, the Palmetto Day Care Center, the CDF, etc.

**JOHN OSBERG**-Retired Manager of Rockwell Corporation. Mr. Osberg worked closely with Julius Berry in Mr. Berry's attempt to bring Rockwell to Tupelo and became close friends after the Rockwell relocation.

**JOE WASHINGTON**-Retired Educator. Mr. Washington and Mr. Berry teamed up to close the gap between the races in Tupelo and, through their courage, helped the black community gain strength and respect in Lee County. Their efforts helped Tupelo/Lee County integrate their school systems in a very smooth fashion.

**MEM LEAKE**-President, Steel City Lumber Company. Mr. Leake's and Mr. Berry's families go way back. Mem, Sr. was the inspiration for the book Mr. Berry wrote, "Short Lengths, Chicken Dinner, and Prayer Meeting." Mr. Leake and Julius Berry lived next to each other and were involved in many projects together.

**EUGENE MURPHEY, M.D.**-Dr. Murphey and Julius Berry were involved in the development of the Parc Monceau Subdivision as well as being close personal friends.

**SENATOR PERRIN PURVIS**-Purvis Insurance - Senator Purvis and Mr. Berry were in the insurance business in Tupelo during the same period. Instead of being uncaring competitors, however, they became good friends who shared ideas and philosophies of business and life that have no doubt affected the success of Senator Purvis.

The following pages will give you a look at a great leader in this community from some of the people who knew him best. These quotes come from an hour and a half roundtable interview with the six people noted previously.

*Jack Reed, Sr., C.E.O., R.W. Reed Co. –*

I think Julius Berry is a great choice for the Leadership Lee project. He was different from anyone else we have ever had in this community and he was a distinctive leader as well. He loved the community, as many of the fellows that he had worked with in various capacities will be able to tell you. But Julius Berry was one of a kind. I think we would all agree to that. He was a man of great humor, great energy and vitality. Julius would like to think of himself, I think, as a Renaissance man. I guess if he had chosen a period of history he would have liked to have lived in, Benjamin Franklin would probably be a fellow he would have really loved to have been. He was well educated, intelligent and very interesting in that respect and just an awful lot of fun.

I think the things about Julius that really stand out will come out and develop during the course of the conversation. Dr. Murphey will tell you about Parc Monceau. I'm sure that one of his biggest contributions was economic development and industrial development. John Osberg was his favorite target in that regard and Mem Leake has worked with him and known him. I had known him all my life. He was a great family friend. I guess if I were trying to comment briefly on Julius, I'd say he was unique, he was distinctive, he was a very loyal friend and he loved this community. And as I say, Mem Leake has known him all of his life. Mem might can make some comments.

*Mem Leake, President, Steel City Lumber Company –*

He was a friend, and a neighbor. Our houses were back-to-back. In business and also in many, many civic responsibilities I think Julius' most significant contribution was probably in his organizational ability, primarily as it had to do with the organization of what came to be United Way, then Lee United Neighbors. In 1960, we were working under the framework of the Tupelo Community Chest. Julius was on that board, and Jack, myself and others. I think Julius was well aware that we were becoming too large a community, too large an area for that organization and he saw the need for us to make the switch to United Neighbors which was becoming very popular in the country at that time. And Julius was that kind of man who, if he felt like something should be done, wouldn't sit around and wait for somebody else to to it. He was perfectly willing to do it himself. So it was largely through his initiative, I think, that United Way came to Tupelo. And it certainly was a great deal because of Julius.

I think that really is one of the strengths of his character: that he really had the

courage of his convictions. If he felt like something needed to be done, he didn't see any need at all to wait for someone else to take the initiative. He was perfectly willing to do it. His intelligence was one of the things that stood him in the best stead. Not just book intelligence or book knowledge, but street sense. He was tremendously well-informed and a very, very smart man in all aspects. I love the story that is told about him, that his boy Kirk was supposed to have come to his mother, Emily, one day and told her that he was going to have to write a theme in English on the atomic bomb. And so she said, "Kirk, my goodness I don't know anything about atomic bombs. Go ask Julius." He said, "Mom, I don't want to know that much about it." I think that he would have certainly learned all there was to know about that, and many other subjects when he went to Julius.

*Sen. Perrin Purvis, Purvis Insurance -*

We were in business together, not as partners but we were out after the same business. He had a very successful and responsible insurance agency and I was beginning to try to build an agency at that time. In those days, after World War II, it was not unusual for somebody or some entrepreneur to come and start an insurance company. That was a big deal - to start an insurance company and sell stock. I remember a person came into town and was going to have an insurance company. The principle business was to be an insurer of the used car market. He said, "Now, we've got insurance for the new cars and all that, but here's an opening." He came in there with us, he showed what promises he had out of other parts to get it and he wanted us to invest in it. He talked to Julius, he talked to me and he talked to Mr. Savery and some others about it. So Julius came over to my office. At that time I was behind the Lyric Theatre and we were talking about it. I said, "Well now, Julius, you've been in it longer than I have. What do you think of this company?" He said, "Well, now people depend on me. When they have a loss, they want it paid." I said, "Well, that's reasonable. That's what they buy it for." He said, "I'll tell you the truth. I don't believe that bunch is going to last as long as a snow ball in 'Florida'." Well, he used a better territory in the explanation but his idea was that he felt responsible to his people and he felt like they were looking to Julius, not just the company. I don't know whether he considered himself very important or not. It was a good outlook. He said if they have a loss, they would expect Julius to pay it. And that was his attitude in business. Businesswise he was an extremely confident and experienced type fellow but he was responsible. He felt as if they were looking to him and he didn't seem to shirk that. He seemed to welcome that attitude. He was President of the State Agent's Association and one of the most colorful presidents they've ever had, on and off the podium.

*John Osberg, Ret. Plant Manager, Rockwell –*

Back in 1950 I was working for Rockwell Manufacturing Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At that time Rockwell was looking for a location in the South to relocate a plant. So they hired an engineering firm to do the looking for them. The engineering firm came up with two recommendations. Both cities were in Mississippi, one was McComb and the other was Tupelo. With Tupelo being ever aggressive and working feverishly to balance agriculture with industry, they sent a group of men to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to convince my bosses that Tupelo was the place to come. Julius Berry was in this group. And Julius Berry, in my opinion, was very, very influential in convincing the bosses that Tupelo was the place to come. After we got here, Julius did not forget us. He worked with us on a day-to-day basis and made our transition from Yankee to Rebel very smooth. And, of course, the early days were hectic but Julius was always there.

As someone previously said we became very, very good friends and we hunted and fished together a lot. When he married Emily he insisted that we take Emily on a duck-hunting trip. So we loaded up on a cold and miserable morning and left Tupelo about four o'clock in the morning. Emily, Julius and I drove over to Sardis. We got over there, put the two of them in the boat and pushed them out to the duck-hunting spot, put the decoys out and hid Julius behind a tree. Emily didn't have any boots on so she had to stay in the boat. But we had to get the boat out of sight so the ducks couldn't see it, because if they saw it they wouldn't come in. So I had one thing to do, and that was to push the boat over in the bushes with Emily in it. The ducks couldn't see the boat and neither could Emily see the ducks. We hunted for maybe two, three hours and finally quit. And I think you will all agree that Emily must have had a tremendous time.

About that time he was developing Parc Monceau and he was building his house at Ellerslie. He mentioned to my bosses one day that he had to have an elevator to get from the bottom floor to the second floor where their living quarters were. So my bosses told me to build him an elevator. So we did. And I understand the elevator is still running.

They mentioned Lee United Neighbors or United Neighbors. The one thing that Julius is directly responsible for, and I don't think there are too many people familiar with it although they are familiar with the program, and that is our Industry Education Day that we have in Tupelo today. I told him about the program we have up North and as someone previously said, all you have to do is tell him and he'll run with it. We honor our

wonderful Industry Education Day every year. I feel it was a tremendous privilege for me to get to know a man of Julius' character and I think he was one of the most intelligent persons that I ever had the opportunity to meet.

*Jack Reed, Sr. –*

Gene Murphey helped him develop Parc Monceau and that's an interesting story in itself. He ought to tell you about that.

*Eugene Murphey, M.D., Internal Medicine & Associates –*

He decided after marrying at a fairly late age, he was about fifty when he married Emily, that he needed a place to live. At the same time both Leroy McCarty and I were looking for a place to build. So the three of us got together as business partners and bought the Parc Monceau Subdivision area, which is about forty-five acres. It was old farm land out in the county and it hadn't been used in about fifty years, so it was terribly grown up. But Julius had the vision that this would be an excellent place to start a new subdivision. He wanted all of his friends to be around him after it was developed and he wanted to sell lots to the people he was familiar with and that he knew quite well. As a result of that I think Ray Purnell, who was in Purnell's Hatcheries, and also L. G. Milam who was with the Milam Clothing industry here both came out and built houses in the area.

Julius wanted to make the lake in Parc Monceau a showplace. Getting back to how he got the name for the subdivision, he had been serving in World War II in Paris and he became enamored of the small park in Paris called Parc Monceau. And nothing would do but that Julius would convince us we should name the subdivision Parc Monceau. We made several efforts to name it an Indian name or some other name but Julius had his way. We finally gave in and gave it the French name of Parc Monceau. He also wanted to make the lake a replica of the one of Parc Monceau in Paris which has a number of columns around the lake. He heard that they were tearing down some old mansions down in Cuba. He wanted to go down and buy these mansions, particularly the columns, float them up through the Gulf of Mexico, up the Mississippi to Memphis and truck them over to Tupelo and put them around the lake. Unfortunately he died before that project ever came to fruition.

One other interesting thing that I remember about Julius beside that he was a good friend, a very intelligent person as has already been mentioned here before, was that he



loved to meditate. He got a monk's robe from somewhere. We never did know for sure where he got it, but his ideal activity every morning was to put on the monk's robe, get out on his front porch, fire a cannon which had come off of a Regatta starting boat, raise the American flag and then sit there and meditate for about an hour before he went to work. That's one of my fond memories of Julius - his meditation.

*Jack Reed, Sr. –*

Yes, he was a non-reconstructed Southerner. He really was. He felt it was terrible we lost the Civil War. I remember one day something had gone wrong for Julius in town. My office was on the second floor. He started down the stairs of the store and he was muttering. He said, "Where was Longstreet. Where was Longstreet." He thought if Longstreet at Gettysburg had been on time that the whole war would have been different. He really was a non-reconstructed Southerner. He used to love to go to Charleston, South Carolina, every year and to Fort Sumter where the flowers are there in springtime. He loved to do it. He was educated at the University of Washington and Lee. And he just loved that whole thing.

He also had a great concern in race relations. And Joseph Washington was a contemporary of Julius' back in that time. And I imagine Joseph has some comments about that because he had close feelings with the black community in Tupelo. He had business interests up there and he was greatly concerned about it. Joseph.

*Joseph Washington, Retired Asst. Principal, THS –*

You are right, Mr. Reed. He was a very dedicated citizen of his community. He was a very intelligent man and he had a great foresight in the future as far as development of the total city. In fact he was responsible for a lot of things that took place that I was a part of when I first came to Tupelo. I was a coach. Our sports events were printed in Wednesday's paper after playing on Friday nights. Julius Berry said it should be put in there Saturday morning because people would have forgotten about it a week later when Wednesday came. So this was strictly against what he felt should happen in this community. Finally through Mr. Taylor Reese we got it printed on Saturday morning.

In fact Mr. Julius Berry was very instrumental in a lot of things that related to the community. He developed Lee United Companions among the black women of the community. He felt that the black women should be making a vital contribution to the home while their husband or the man of the house provided resources for income in

order to make the family. He was constantly supportive to the relationship of them being closely knitted together, that there would not be a great division. He was also concerned about the blight that the black community was putting on the City of Tupelo because of the poverty area in which they lived. Julius Berry was very instrumental in helping to bring in the housing project in Tupelo in order that we might live in decent neighborhoods.

He was also responsible in the field of education. He used to hire me to work at his house. He had me there for one purpose - a kind of a shield because some students needed tutoring in chemistry and physics. So I tutored a lot of students in chemistry and physics. And I was under the shield of Mr. Julius Berry because of tension of the races - a black man teaching white students. And this is the kind of thing that Julius Berry did. He provided a lot of leadership among us that made us come in and be a part of this great community, to really service, to be dedicated to help build Tupelo and to share in its great interest so it could grow and develop. That was the kind of person that Julius Berry was.

*Jack Reed, Sr. -*

He really was. You know, Gene said that he meditated in his monk's costume out at Parc Monceau. That was after he was married. Before he was married he meditated on the porch swing there on Jefferson Street. And we would all walk to school or drive by to see Mr. Julius Berry swinging in his swing. And he'd swing high, and he would be swinging and swinging, and he had his music playing high. He had to turn it up just awfully loud, the classic music. Everybody thought he was quite eccentric and quite a character. And he certainly was that.

*John Osberg -*

Well, he went over to England one year in the coronation, didn't he?

*Jack Reed, Sr. -*

That's right. He loved golf. He went to play the old course in Scotland, St. Andrews, and he played by himself. He couldn't get anybody to play with and he'd play a different ball. He'd bring it back and say, "This ball was at St. Andrews." He'd think you were just excited about him having played there. He bought a putter that he'd brought home with him. He really would have loved to have lived in England and France and in the

eighteenth century, as I've said. Those were things that really appealed to him. But as Joseph said, he was really with it. He loved this community and he loved the families of this community.

When he was courting Emily, Emily had a home up there and they invited him to meet the family and spend a weekend with them. And Julius, as anybody who went duck-hunting knew, snored enormously. He was just a champion world class snorer. There was no question about that. He smoked a cigar, too. All the time. He looked like Winston Churchill, but he was...

*General comment –*

He would appreciate that, Jack.

*Jack Reed, Sr. –*

...he was a great snorer. And he told us, he got up there at night and was afraid that if they heard him snoring that the family would think he was not a fit companion for Emily. And so after everybody had gone to sleep he'd sneak down and sleep in the porch swing, get up in the morning and go in as though he had stayed upstairs in bed. He told us this for a fact - so they wouldn't hear him snore. I'm sure they heard him snoring out on the porch. I don't think it helped any at all.

*Mem Leake –*

Julius Berry was a unique individual. I think another way he was certainly unique was in his looks, his appearance. Julius was a big teddybear of a man and what little hair he had was always in disarray. He wore little Benjamin Franklin glasses that he peeped over all the time. He had a cigar in his mouth, ashes always down his front, and his tie was very rarely pulled all the way up. Mine probably isn't either. His suit was going this way and that, his shoes were not polished and quite often untied. But he wasn't really concerned with that because he had more important things on his mind than what he looked like. He had things to do. He had thoughts to think and things to accomplish. And that's what he would do. But he was a man that I think had his priorities in order and I never have, in thinking back about him many, many times, really known whether he didn't really care what people thought about him, or whether he thought so strongly about what he believed and what he wanted to do that he didn't really care at all what they thought about him. The results were the same, in that he was a man of action.

He got things done. And I can't help but think, and I've thought about this many, many times, Reader's Digest has each month this little section called "The Most Unforgettable Character I Have Ever Met". For me, that would have to be Julius Berry.

*Jack Reed, Sr. –*

He was absolutely intensely loyal to it. He had this great sense of humor. He'd put you down and he'd put himself down. You all asked about the time he really put me down once. I was in my early thirties and he had invited me to speak at Baptist Brotherhood which was very important to him. They had given me a nice introduction, I had had two or three things happen that they recognized me for, and then he got up and he said, "You know, well, now young Reed, we think young Reed has done very well and we think that he's been successful in this, that and the other, but I would remind him that Alexander the Great had conquered the known world before he was young Reed's age." He named several other prominent people, and then he said, "And Jesus Christ had, before he was young Reed's age, you know, had changed the course of history." So Julius could really put you down, I'll tell you that. And he didn't hesitate to do so. He was very good about it, a very good human about it. But he was really a remarkable person.

*Joseph Washington –*

The Palmetto Day Care Center is a very unique place for children to go and to be a part of. Julius Berry, under Ms. Alice Little, worked to the extent that he would provide funds for that Day Care Center to operate through organizations or means that he got solicited funds from. He also had her to teach those women of the community how to sew, how to make clothes for their own children. He influenced them to can fruit and vegetables and put them up for the winter months so that they would have food, because this was a period during which the men of the household did not have much income. Therefore, Julius Berry saw to it that these children, these families, would not be hungry or starving during the winter months. He saw to it that their children were provided with carpooling among community members in order for the kids to could get to school on time, in order that they would not grow up into the world illiterate, which we face so often today. He saw to it that children who were part of families who were on welfare would attend school. He would see to it. And he would report them to the Welfare and ask the Welfare to obtain assistance for those people until those children got back in school. They weren't out of school, because Julius Berry had the foresight, had the wisdom, had the understanding, had the faith, had the insight to see what needed to be done to help Tupelo become a better community.