



Who was James Killion?

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - With the recent controversy regarding the rims being taken at James H. Killion Park at Salu, many people in the area have their eyes on the park - but who was James H. Killion?

Abe Lee Barham, who was mentored by Killion, fought hard for the city to rename Salu Park in his honor. Barham described Killion as a community activist who worked at Laclede Steel and fought hard to have a union in the business. Killion also sat on numerous community boards, was a leader in the Boy Scouts, and was a member of the Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Barham said his mentor resided on Salu Street, less than two blocks from the park, which has since been named in his honor.

According to his entry in *20th Century African American Leaders in Alton*, a book from the Committee on Black Pioneers of the Alton Museum of History and Art Exhibit Catalog, Killion was born in Alton on May 25, 1918, to Lottie Wyatt and Reverend James Killion. He received his education in the Alton School District before going to Shurtleff College in Alton, the University of Illinois in Champaign and the University of Missouri Steel Work Institute.

Killion was the first black person hired by Laclede Steel. He worked there until his retirement in 1983, after 38 years of service. He was also a union leader, and was the first black person elected to office within that union, which he helped to create.

He was also the first person of color to enlist in the United States Army during the outbreak of World War II. He was a member of the D-Day forces, and was a reservist during the Korean Conflict.

In Alton, Killion was responsible for the city's annexation of the Oakwood area with the intention of the area's primarily poor and black citizens receiving better services from the city. He was also a member of the city's Human Relations Commission, and was the former president and treasurer of the Dunbar PTA, a member of the advisory board of the former St. Joseph Hospital, general co-chairman of the Alton/Wood River Area United Fund drive, board member of the Alton/Godfrey Human Development Resource Center, was a member of the Alton Branch of the NAACP, president of the board at Senior Services Plus and he was a member of the board of Southwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging.

He also served as a baseball coach and was a referee for junior high basketball games.

Because of his service to the community, breaking of several inhibiting color barriers and general spirit of leadership, the former Salu Park was named in his honor.

James H. Killion, Jr. died on February 11, 1997.

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This park was dedicated for
James Killion, who worked
tirelessly for the betterment
of all of Alton.

