

UGRAD STATEN WAS CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER

He also became a voice for addiction recovery.

By RANDY FURST
randy.furst@startribune.com

Randy Staten, a Twin Cities community leader who championed groundbreaking civil rights legislation as a state representative and whose personal struggles with addiction led him to help others, has died at 76.

Staten overcame a very public struggle with drug addiction that led him to carry the message of recovery to black people in his later years. He became an ordained minister, serving at two of the most prominent black churches in Minneapolis — Zion Baptist Church and later New Salem Missionary Baptist Church.

Staten died May 29 in Charlotte, N.C., said his son, Randy Staten Jr. His father had been living with family members.

"We lost one of the greatest strategic minds that I have known," said the Rev. Jerry McAfee, who presides at New Salem, where Staten's funeral was held Saturday. He said Staten taught him to know what demands to make before setting out to protest.

"I think one of his problems was his level of intelligence," said McAfee. "It intimidated people, especially the powers that be. Minnesota Nice doesn't always like intelligent black people."

Staten graduated from Second Ward High School in Charlotte in 1962 and won a scholarship to play football for the University of Minne-

sota, where he was recruited by Golden Gophers coach Murray Warmath.

There, Staten earned a degree in business management. And he excelled as a defensive end. After graduating, he played two years of professional football, the last year with the New York Giants in 1967. A leg injury ended his football career, and he returned to Minneapolis.

Back in Minnesota, Staten worked for Cargill and was active in civil rights causes.

"He was a community leader, mobilizing people in action," said fellow civil rights leader Bill English. Staten was active in helping Pilot City, a community organization; the Way, a North Side black activist community center, and Sabathani Community Center on the city's south side, English said.

In 1980, Staten was elected

to the state House from Minneapolis and served three terms. At the time of his election, he was Minnesota's only black legislator.

"Randy led the fight to get the state of Minnesota to disinvest its funds in South Africa," English said. South Africa, at the time, had a racist apartheid regime.

Staten also spearheaded passage of the African-American Heritage Act, which required child protection agencies seeking to place black children for adoption and foster care with relatives or other black families.

"He also led the effort to have Martin Luther King's birthday become a state holiday," English said.

"He was very proud of that," Randy Staten Jr. said. "It was very important to him."

Staten struggled with drug addiction. In 1985, while a leg-

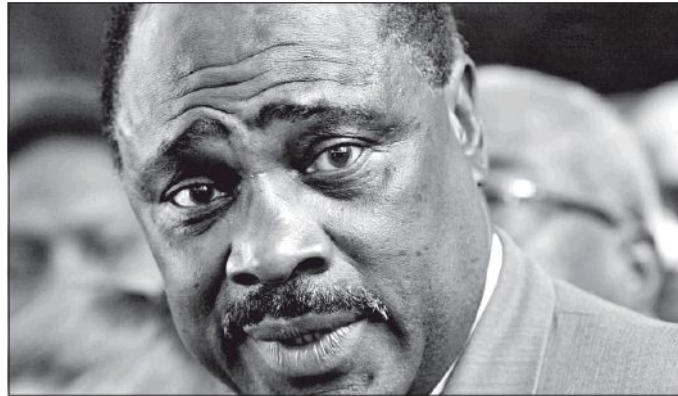
islator, he was arrested on suspicion of writing 76 bad checks totaling \$8,200 and pleaded guilty to theft of more than \$250. He was sentenced to two years of probation.

After a move to expel him from the Legislature failed, Staten was censured and did not run for re-election.

In 1987, he was arrested on suspicion of failing to pay a \$760 hotel bill. He was also convicted of shoplifting, and served four days of a 90-day term in the county workhouse.

"I've done some things I'm not proud of," Staten said at his sentencing, apologizing to his family, friends and the black community.

Before those incidents, he had helped Peter Hayden in 1975 start Turning Point, a culturally specific service center focused on chemical dependency, housing issues and mental health. After his



BRUCE BISPING

Randy Staten in 2003. In 1980, he was Minnesota's only black legislator.

struggle with addiction, "we got him into Hazelden," the renowned chemical treatment program, said Hayden.

"He had several relapses, but at the end of the day, he pulled out of it and became a better man," Hayden said.

Staten, who became a minister, once said he liked to talk to black men and women about drug addiction so they'd know it wasn't a death sentence.

"He wanted them to know that life doesn't end because you have an alcohol or drug problem. He was able to say, 'All you got to do is look at me, because I took it a step at a time and I am a better man for it,'" Hayden said.

Brian Herron, a former Minneapolis City Council member who went to prison for accepting a bribe, said Staten stood by him, telling him it was possible to make a comeback.

Staten's advice, he said, was "don't get stuck on what you have done and where you've been." Herron is now the pastor at Zion Baptist Church.

"My overall impressions were not his troubles, but what he attempted to do," said longtime civil rights leader Josie Johnson.

In addition to son Randy Jr., Staten is survived by another son, Shomari Staten of Carrollton, Texas; a daughter, Malaika Simmons of Charlotte, and a brother, Louis Staten of Queens, N.Y.

Staff librarian John Wareham contributed research for this report.
Randy Furst • 612-201-5522
Twitter: @randyfurst

Reprinted by permission of the Star Tribune (Minneapolis, MN).