

2008 MLK Spirit Award Recipient **Sam Austin Jr.**

Retired University City educator, Sam Austin Jr., is University City's 2008 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Spirit Award winner.

Mr. Austin and his family were among the first African Americans to integrate into University City. They moved here from Kentucky in the mid-1960's following his deployment to the Vietnam War. That era was the height of racial tensions across the country.

Upon his return from Vietnam, Mr. Austin became very active in the University City community and its school district – first as a parent and later as a teacher and administrator. He taught physical education at both Delmar-Harvard and Nathaniel Hawthorne Elementary Schools and served as the assistant principal and principal at Hanley Junior High and University City High Schools.

Mr. Austin believes in racial unity and lives his life as example of that belief. He has never seen race as an issue or barrier. He encourages others to adopt that philosophy as well. He instilled in his family the belief that character makes a person who they are, and not race. As a little league coach and scoutmaster, he worked tirelessly to ensure that each child, regardless of their race, treated each other with respect, helped one another and was courteous toward each other.

Mr. Austin received his undergraduate degree from Fisk University, master's degree from Webster University and School Administrative Certificate from Washington University. He is a retired U.S. Army Captain and served as the mayor of Olivette.

During his stint in the military, Mr. Austin was awarded the Bronze Star and received the Vietnam Commendation Medal. He has also been involved in a number of civic and local organizations.

Sam Austin Jr. and his wife Katherine are the parents of three adult children.

