

Alumni persona #1: Aged Activist and Sage, Clarence



Clarence, 82, is a retired African American professional for whom the concept of community engagement is embedded in his work and life. “Active citizenship” is motivated by his own life experiences of discrimination and the injustices he has seen around him. He rose up through the ranks of a very traditional, white-dominated manufacturing industry—first as an electrical technician and eventually as a commissioner of personnel. In his professional capacity, he very intentionally opened doors to employment for African Americans by developing an entry-level employment program and transforming

the recruitment process. He was a nontraditional student who earned credit for these workplace initiatives as well as his leadership in the St. Paul Urban League and the NAACP. He was also the first African American to run for and be elected to a suburban St. Paul School Board, a public commitment rooted in his desire for his own history to be included in the education of his children.

Who Clarence represents: The wisened elders understand social change as a long-term process of “bending the arch of history” that requires time, patience, relationships, commitment and self-sacrifice. Clarence is rooted in the idea that no one accomplishes anything alone, whether in our “individual” (or “personal”) lives or in the social institutions in which we participate, and encourages all Metropolitan State University students to think about what they can do to enhance the success of others. The reward lies in learning, often years later, that engagement for change actually benefited someone’s life—whether it was a former colleague he met on the street, someone he never knew or his own children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren enjoying a better life.

Connection to Citizen Alum: These alumni have a legacy and the time to share it and are at a stage in their lives of wanting to inspire others to carry their life lessons forward. They may want to mentor students, speak to a class, be part of an advisory council and/or attend relevant campus events.