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## An enduring portrait of passion, leadership

*Caldwell, 85, was 1st African-American on Denver council*

By Kieran Nicholson,  
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The Denver Post

A portrait of Elvin Caldwell Sr., with his shoulders painted as broad as the scene from Five Points shadowing him in the backdrop, was hung Saturday in the neighborhood's library, a day af-

ter the Denver pioneer died.

Caldwell, who served Denver for 25 years as the city's first African-American member of the City Council, died Friday. He was 85. The cause of his death was not known.

He represented Denver's District 8 with passion, developing a community center and hiring local folks at businesses he owned, said Gwendolyn Crenshaw, manager of the library named after Caldwell in the Five Points neighborhood north of downtown.

Crenshaw and artist Robert E. Evans hung the portrait of Caldwell at the \$16 million Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library that the city dedicated last year.

"This was his district," said Evans, pointing at the portrait's background, which takes a vantage point from Welton Street looking toward the Rossonian Hotel.

"His accomplishments were vast, but I wanted to get the community because that's what he

loved and that's what he dedicated his life to," he said.

Caldwell helped establish the Eastside Neighborhood Health Center and Five Points Community Center. In 1990, the Denver City Council created the Elvin R. Caldwell Community Service Plaza.

The Denver native also served as the city's safety manager and as a Colorado legislator, serving three terms in the House.

SEE CALDWELL ON 23A



**Caldwell:** Former councilman, who died Friday, had represented District 8, which includes the Five Points neighborhood.

The Denver Post / Glenn Asakawa

Elvin Caldwell, right, sits with longtime friend Omar Blair last year after learning the city was naming the African American Research Library after them. Blair died March 25. In honor of Caldwell, Denver will lower the flag at city hall to half-staff this week.

### CALDWELL FROM PAGE 1A

"He contributed so much to Denver," said Dr. Bernard F. Gipson Sr. "I think he was one of the citizens that will be truly missed in our city."

Gipson, the first African-American board-certified surgeon in Colorado, was a longtime friend and former physician to Caldwell.

"I had an opportunity to work with him on many community projects," Gipson said. "I found him to be an extremely wonderful elder and a fellow who could communicate well with all of Denver's citizens."

Caldwell was born in Denver on April 11, 1919, one of 12 children. He graduated from East High School and earned a track scholarship to the University of Colorado.

He married Frank "Frankie" Harriette Webb, a union that lasted for 60 years and produced four children. He lived in east Denver all of his life, a fact that Elvin Caldwell Jr. said his father was very proud of.

"He was able to get along with people of all races and economic backgrounds. He was gregarious, outgoing, personable and well-liked," his son said.

Caldwell's portrait now hangs

next to Omar D. Blair's at the library.

Blair, who died March 25, was a former Tuskegee Airman and the first African-American president of the Denver school board. Caldwell and Gipson were pallbearers at Blair's funeral, Gipson said.

In honor of Caldwell, Denver will lower the flag at city hall to half-staff this week.

"Mayor (John) Hickenlooper was extremely saddened to learn of Mr. Caldwell's passing," the mayor's spokeswoman, Lindy Eichenbaum Lent, said Saturday. "He was one of the true icons of Denver, a leader of his generation and those that followed."

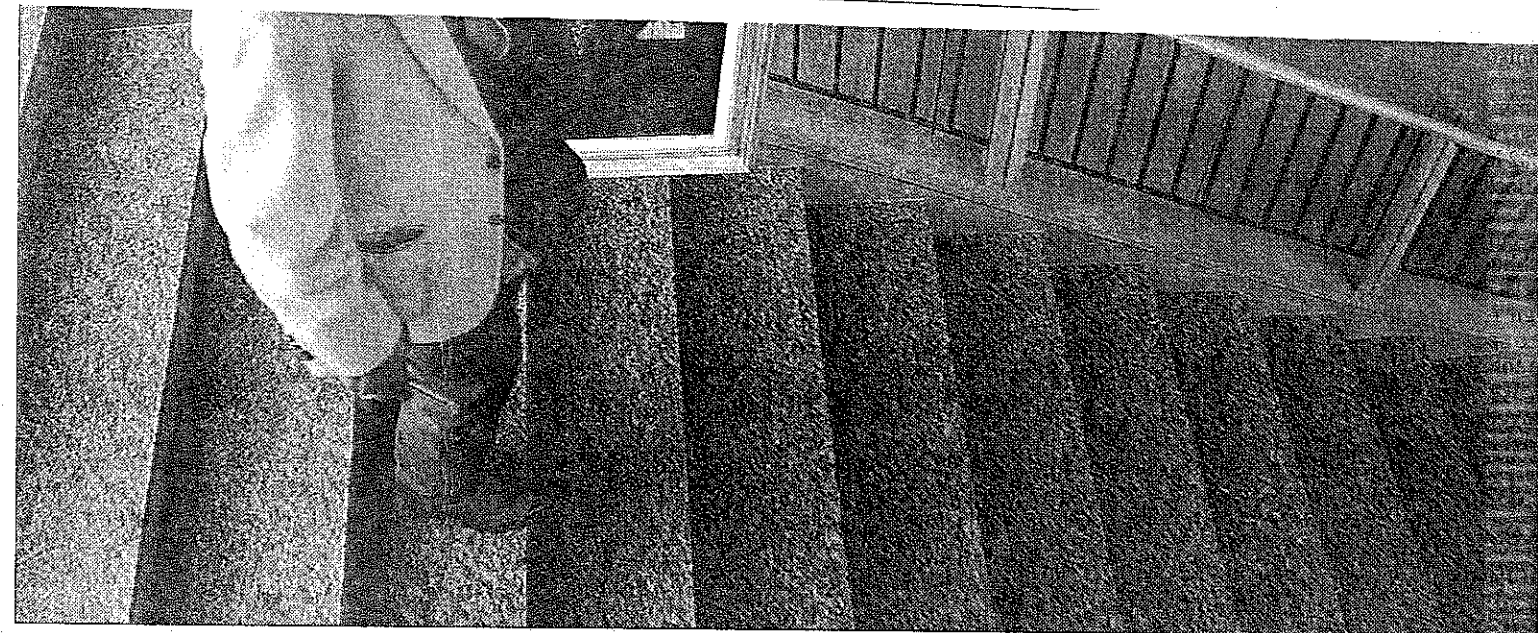
"His impact will be felt for generations to come."

Caldwell was a champion for the rights of African-Americans, and he served in numerous community, state and national organizations, including the board of directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

He was instrumental in fighting discrimination against minorities.

His leadership resulted in the state's first Fair Employment Practices Act.

"He had to take a stand on issues in the 1950s and 1960s that



The Denver Post / Andy Cross

Artist Robert E. Evans holds his portrait of Elvin Caldwell that was hung Saturday next to one of Omar Blair at the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library. The portrait's background reflects Denver's Five Points, 'the community ... (Caldwell) loved,' Evans said.

were not popular," Caldwell's son said.

But one of his proudest moments, however, was when the library was named in his honor.

About a year ago, Caldwell told The Denver Post he was so excited about the library that he couldn't sleep the night before its dedication and he stayed up until 2 a.m. reading.

"It's a great honor," Caldwell said as he shook hands with well-wishers and autographed their souvenirs at the April 26, 2003, library dedication. "It's a very nice

and well-thought-out facility."

Caldwell, who served on the City Council from 1955 to 1980, when he became the city's safety manager, was a close friend and mentor of former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb.

In 2002, before Webb left office, Caldwell helped spearhead a petition drive to name the city's new office building near Civic Center the Wellington E. Webb Municipal Office Building.

Prior to the petition and Caldwell's work, city buildings could not be named after someone until

the person had left office.

During his drive in support of the mayor, Caldwell credited Webb with helping the city prosper.

"I think there is no question, if anyone is honest and sincere, that more has been accomplished in the last few years than in recent history," Caldwell said.

Webb could not be reached for comment.

Officials at the library on Saturday remembered a humble man but a trailblazer, one who shied

away from the spotlight.

For months, the library staff had tried to get Caldwell to come there to unveil the portrait. But he didn't want all the attention that came with that.

"You have to let your elders do what they want," Crenshaw said.

Caldwell is survived by his three sons, Elvin Jr. and John, both of Denver, and Ken of Danville, Calif.; two sisters, Rita Beasley of Sun City, Ariz., and June Turner of Bowie, Md.; 12 grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; and other relatives.