

Roy Davis

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The early years were a struggle as Mr. Davis, with Gorin as his business partner, worked to make the cave hospitable for paying customers. They both held factory jobs, worked long hours, and enlisted the help of an army of volunteers to lift the cave project off the ground.

"In 1952 when we started developing the cave, we didn't even know what tourism was," said Davis in an interview with the *Standard* during the 50-year celebration of Cumberland Caverns in 2006. "We wanted people to see the beauty of the cave and the beauty that we loved. That could have happened to a greater extent if we weren't so far out of the way."

The cave was rough and without the lighting and well-worn paths that adorn it today. An early obstacle was Mr. Davis didn't own the property and his constant trips to the cave became a nuisance for property owner Red Powell.

"He was up there so

much, Mr. Powell posted a sign that said 'Roy Davis Keep Out,'" said Cumberland Caverns marketing director Kelly Roberts. "Fortunately, he had taken a ton of pictures of what the inside of the cave looked like and he took those to Mr. Powell to show him all that was back there. After he saw those pictures, he told him it was OK."

Mr. Davis may have been given the green light, but his pocketbook lacked green bucks. His budget was minimal, especially when it came to advertising the cave's magnificence.

"He had charisma and a lot of young energy," said Bill Walter, who served as a Cumberland Caverns director for 43 years. "It was a shoestring operation for many years and I don't think anybody believed it would be successful. We lacked advertising because there was never enough money to advertise. I think the internet really helped to get the word out about it and Bluegrass Underground helped too."

Mr. Davis, bursting with eccentricities, brought the

cave to life in 1956 when it became open to the public. He would continue to add his personal flair along with way.

A musician who was fond of playing the organ, Mr. Davis made a trip to the Metropolitan Theater in New York with the intent of buying an organ with \$1,000. He left with the organ and a ¾-ton chandelier which still hangs in the Volcano Room of Cumberland Caverns today.

"The chandelier was so big, and so dusty and dirty, he didn't know how to clean it," said Walter. "So he took it to Village Car Wash and blasted all the grime off it there. He said he was chasing beads all over the parking lot."

Cave tours were once only a seasonal offering, usually from May to October. But Cumberland Caverns has grown into a year-round attraction that's open daily.

Walter was working at the cave in the early 1970s when Gov. Winfield Dunn took a tour. The governor noticed the poor condition of the road leading to the cave and

asked why it wasn't in better repair. When he was told Cumberland Caverns officials had never gained any velocity toward that endeavor, the governor took action himself.

"They started paving a week later," said Walter.

Mr. Davis grew the business from just a trickle of visitors in its early days to around 35,000 visitors a year by the 50-year anniversary. Over 56,000 visited the cave in 2017.

"Roy Davis was known around the world as a master of commercializing and lighting caves," said Robby Black, general manager of Cumberland Caverns. "He made a huge time investment here in Warren County opening Cumberland Caverns for commercial tours in 1956. That investment has brought millions of tourists through Warren County and has provided jobs for countless teenagers and adults alike over the 62 years Cumberland Caverns has been in operation. Roy helped to shape the lives of many of Warren County's youth, including mine."

Billed as America's second largest cave and Tennessee's largest show cave, Cumberland Caverns has a maximum depth of 550 feet underground and features 30 miles of caverns. It has been a popular spot for

overnight Boy Scout trips, weddings, and concerts. A part-time minister, Mr. Davis performed some of the weddings himself.

The cave was discovered in 1810 by Aaron Higgenbotham, who is said to have become trapped for three days while exploring it by himself. During the Civil War, the cave was used as a saltpeter mine. As it is known today, the cave is a combination of two caves known as Higgenbotham Cave and Henshaw Cave.

Mr. Davis had depth outside of Cumberland Caverns. He was an integral part of the National Speleological Society and was named editor of its monthly newsletter from August 1957 to January 1960.

In 1965, Mr. Davis helped form the National Caves Association to further the interest of commercial cave owners. His first commercial cave lighting project outside of Warren County was for The Lost Sea in Sweetwater. That would illuminate his lighting career as he did other projects for caves such as Ruby Falls, Fantastic Caverns and Crystal Caves in Bermuda. It's estimated he did work for more than 50 show caves.

Mr. Davis lived next to Cumberland Caverns for decades, accumulating inter-

esting memorabilia in his home that included a 35mm movie projector, a linotype print shop, and an extensive model train collection.

Mr. Davis sold Cumberland Caverns to Jim Herschend in 2007. Jim was a tour guide at Cumberland Caverns from 1971-72, and his family has been in the cave and entertainment business for over 60 years. Jim's father, Jack, had been friends with Mr. Davis for years as fellow cavers.

"Roy Davis was loved and respected by hundreds of leaders in the cave industry," said Jack Herschend. "He not only developed Cumberland Caverns but had huge projects in Meramec Caverns, Ruby Falls, Luray Caverns, Howe Caverns and many other caves in the USA. Roy also developed several caverns in the Caribbean. Many will remember Roy for his faith, his love for others, as well as his love for fun and adventure. He will be greatly missed."

Funeral service for Mr. Davis will be held Wednesday at First Christian Church in Sparta where he served as organist for many years. In lieu of flowers, he had requested any donations be made to the church's music fund at 109 Gaines Street, Sparta, TN 38583.

Survey reflects differences in perception of progress

(AP)— Fifty years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., on April 4, 1968, American perceptions of progress toward racial equality remain largely divided along racial lines, a recent AP-NORC poll shows.

The majority of African-Americans surveyed saw little to no progress toward equal treatment in key areas the civil rights movement sought to address. White respondents frequently portrayed a rosier picture. A review by the Associated Press shows the available data more often align with African-Americans' less optimistic reflection of their reality.

The survey asked respondents how African-Americans have fared in topics ranging from access to affordable housing to political representation. Three topics generated the most polarized responses from African-Americans and whites: treatment by police, the criminal justice system and voting rights.

TREATMENT BY POLICE

King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech set police brutality among the chief issues civil rights activists sought to address. Poll responses show more than 7 out of 10 African-Americans think little or no progress has been made in treatment by police over the last 50 years.

Traffic stops are the main reason police interact with



the public, and some studies indicate the experiences of white and black drivers are remarkably different. A Stanford University study pieced together data from 16 states to show black drivers are more likely to be stopped, ticketed, searched and arrested than white drivers. Another study by a professor at Harvard University compiled data from federal sources and concluded that when black drivers are stopped by police, they are more likely to be grabbed, handcuffed and have a gun pointed at them than white drivers.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

At the time of King's

assassination, the U.S. prison population was a fraction of its current size, and the rate of incarceration for African-Americans was more than five times the rate for whites, data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics show.

In the AP/NORC poll, more than 6 of 10 African-Americans said that little or no progress has been made in the criminal justice system's treatment of African-Americans in the last 50 years.

By the late 1990s, the rate of black incarceration had risen to over eight times the rate for whites. While that gap has narrowed, data from BJS shows that in 2016 it still remained slightly wider than it was in 1968.



Nana's Playground

Judy Stotts Memorial Playground

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1 Corinthians 16:14

Joseph Stotts would like to thank all the above listed donors for this project. It would not have been possible without your compassion and generosity for our community. A special thanks to Bridgestone who donated all our rubber mulch for free!



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Annual Legislative Breakfast set for this Friday

The McMinnville-Warren County Chamber of Commerce will present the annual Legislative Breakfast this Friday, April 6, at the Otis Floyd TSU Nursery Research Center, 472 Cadillac Lane. Start time is 7 a.m.

State Sen. Janice Bowling and state Rep. Paul Sherrell are scheduled to be in attendance. State Rep. Judd Matheny is not expected to be there due to an illness in the family.

In an effort to get another lawmaker in attendance, Tennessee House Speaker Beth Harwell and House Minority Leader

Craig Fitzhugh were invited. Harwell has declined, citing a scheduling conflict, but Rep. Fitzhugh says he plans to be in attendance.

The Chamber will not have an open forum this year, but will allow for questions to be submitted in a suggestions box and drawn if time allows. The breakfast is expected to sell out prior to Friday.

Tickets can be purchased by calling the Chamber at 473-6611. The cost is \$10 for Chamber members and \$15 for non-members.

Attendance is limited to 90.



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