

Home > Chicago

Chicago

Chicago-Business

Chicago-Community

Chicago-Local News

Community

A Crusader Special Feature

Posted By **crusader** - December 19, 2018

2797

0



Share on Facebook



Tweet on Twitter



Lovin' it after 50 years

It survived white flight in Woodlawn and South Shore, gangs and unscrupulous white investors to mark the 50th Anniversary of America's first Black owned McDonald's, on Stony Island and Marquette Road, forever changing the golden

arches and economic opportunities for Blacks around the country.

By Erick Johnson

It's midnight on Saturday at McDonald's on Stony Island and Marquette Road. The restaurant's interior is closed, but the drive thru is still open. A line of cars fills up two separate drive thru lanes. One driver can be heard ordering three Happy Meals, a large Big Mac meal and a smoothie.

Fifty years ago, one year after the Big Mac was introduced, this McDonald's became more than just a fast food joint. It became the first-Black owned franchise in McDonald's history, giving hope to a generation of ambitious Black businessmen and women seeking a piece of the American Dream around the country.



HERMAN PETTY

Four days before Christmas in 1968, Herman Petty, a barber and worker for the Chicago Transit Authority, took a big leap and opened his first of eight McDonald's franchises with no experience and no restaurant skills. There was no coverage of this historic event in any of the Black or white newspapers.

The **Crusader** ran a story about the predominately Contract Buyers League, a group of 700 Black homeowners who were boycotting unscrupulous white contract owners

by putting their monthly payments into a third party account. Another story was about a group of Black women workers boycotting Montgomery Ward after the retailer refused to stop using a vendor that allegedly mistreated Black women.



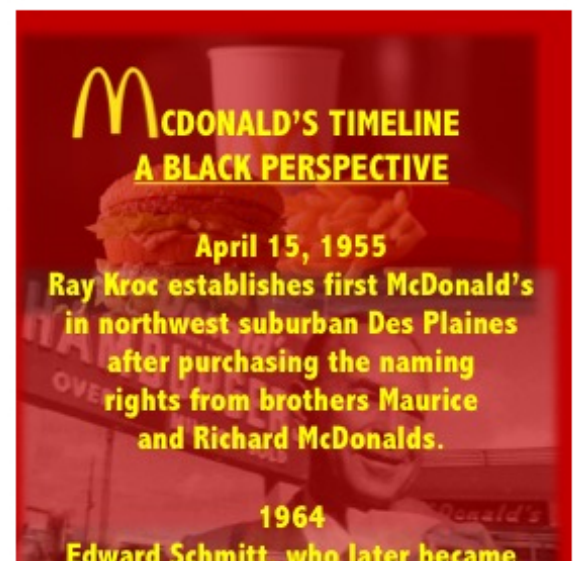
FRANCHISE OWNER YOLANDA TRAVIS, speaks with staff member Walter Metcalf. (Photo by Erick Johnson).

But what happened on December 21, 1968 in East Woodlawn was a story that would have widespread impact on the future of Blacks seeking to biggie size their dreams and economic fortunes. In the middle of all this change was a McDonald's restaurant at 6560 Stony Island. It was once owned and operated by white businessmen, but racial in Woodlawn led to the purchase of the nation's first Black McDonald's. Fifty years later, residents are still lovin' it.

When this McDonald's opened its doors to a changing neighborhood, it instantly it became a symbol of Black achievement that ushered in a new era of economic and racial change under America's golden arches. It happened at a time when there were no Black franchise owners in a chain that was growing exponentially in lily white neighborhoods around the country.

But Friday December 21, America's first Black-owned McDonald's that has survived gangs, hard times and scandal will quietly mark its 50th anniversary.

It's a milestone for a groundbreaking establishment that has not only served up tons of quarter pounders and fries but paved the way for millionaire businessman and mayoral candidate Willie Wilson and scores of Black millionaire franchise owners across the country while launching the illustrious career of McDonald's first and only Black CEO, Don Thompson.




For five decades this McDonald's has served thousands of Black residents as it survived white flight and intense change in Woodlawn and South Shore. As those two predominately Black neighborhoods underwent dramatic change after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, this McDonald's made history as it became the first Black-owned franchise in America.

His restaurant would become a gift to many aspiring Black entrepreneurs who dreamed of owning a McDonald's franchise in Chicago and America.

Chicagoland has always been home of the house that Oak Park resident and McDonald's founder Ray Kroc built. On April 15, 1955, Kroc founded the first McDonald's in Des Plaines, a white middle class suburb northwest of Chicago. Kroc purchased the rights of the fast food restaurant from brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald in San Bernardino, CA.

In 1961, Kroc launched a training program, later called Hamburger University, at a new McDonald's restaurant in Elk Grove Village. Franchisees were trained on the proper methods for running a successful McDonald's restaurant.



McDonald's CEO, awards Herman Petty a franchise with two white co-owners while Blacks were moving into South Shore and East Woodlawn.

1967

McDonald's Big Mac sandwich is created.

1968

Herman Petty becomes the first Black owner of a McDonald's as two white investors are forced out in the McDonald's franchise at 6560 Stony Island.

1969

Seven Black businessmen purchase the second McDonald's franchise of color. They purchased four in July 1969 and were the first Black group to own multiple McDonald's franchises at the same time.

1969

There are 12 Black-owned franchises in the country. Roland Jones becomes the McDonald's first Black regional consultant.

July, 1969

Black protesters in Cleveland, OH shut down four white McDonald's after a McDonald's executive said Blacks lacked the business skills to own a franchise.

How I teamed with a few

After decades of being located in Oak Park, McDonald's headquarters is now in the West Loop on the former site of Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Studios.

After Kroc opened the first McDonald's, his company grew and planted fast food restaurants in white neighborhoods in Chicago and America. None of these restaurants were located in Black neighborhoods.

But things began to change in Chicago in the 1960s. Blacks began to move into white neighborhoods where there were McDonald's restaurants. In Woodlawn and South Shore, tensions were rising among white and Jewish residents who fled north to Evanston and Skokie.

When King was gunned down on the balcony of a Memphis hotel in 1968, riots erupted in Chicago and some 128 cities across the country. In Chicago, the looting and violence were largely confined to the city's West Side, and businesses on the South Side including Woodlawn and South Shore, survived with little damage. The tony brownstones of Hyde Park and Kenwood also were left untouched.



However, the riots frightened McDonald's executives, whose office in the Loop stood just miles away from burning buildings and angry protesters. The white population in Woodlawn had fallen to 42,615 in 1950 from 50,716 in 1940.

According to the book, "Building the Black Metropolis: African American



franchise owner, African American

Entrepreneurship in Chicago,” McDonald’s came up with a “survival strategy” to weather the storm. The company sent temporary Black managers to manage McDonald’s restaurants whose neighborhoods were filling up with Black residents. Lack of economic opportunities had become an issue for Blacks on the South Side and America. Unemployment was high, and jobs were scarce. President Richard Nixon in his televised speeches talked about Black capitalism in the wake of King’s assassination.

In his autobiography, Kroc said he was on a mission to find a Black franchisee in “response to the social change in the sixties” and to advance Black capitalism.

The first would be Petty, a barber, who lived several blocks from the McDonald’s and worked as a CTA bus driver at night. He saved his money to become a McDonald’s

franchise owner. In 1964, Edward Schmitt, then the Chicago Regional Manager who later become McDonald’s CEO, awarded Petty the McDonald’s franchise on Stony Island. Petty underwent training at McDonald’s training school, Hamburger University in Elk Grove.

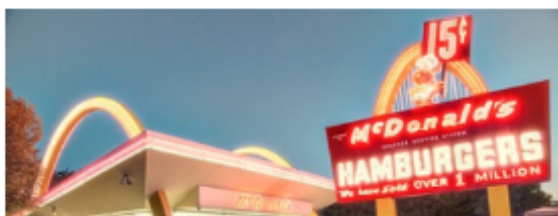
Securing a McDonald’s franchise is an expensive undertaking and historically a hurdle for Blacks. Today, it costs \$500,000 to obtain a franchise and McDonald’s has limits on how much applicants can borrow to purchase a

McDonald's has limits on how much applicants can borrow to purchase a license. Reports said McDonald's waived some of its requirements so Petty could live out his dream of being a franchise owner.

Petty originally did not own the McDonald's on Stony Island outright. He co-owned it with Arthur Duplessie and Joseph Greenberg. Both were white investors who originally asked Petty to run the restaurant as part of a "zebra" or "salt and pepper" partnership, according to various reports. "Salt and pepper" deals were the result of changing urban areas, where McDonald's restaurants were left in neighborhoods that became predominately Black. These "partnerships" were viewed as exploitative as white investors and McDonald's would reap the profits while their Black partner would be relegated to the day-to-day operations of the restaurant.

It's a part of McDonald's history that the company remains silent about. But according to author Patricia Sowell Harris' book, "None of Us Is As Good As All of Us: How McDonald's Prospers by Embracing Inclusion and Diversity," Petty had a majority stake in his first McDonald's. His white partners were "found to have quietly included high management fees, neglected to invest in equipment, failed to pay many vendors and suppliers and ultimately" began cleaning out the cash registers each day. Petty's two white investors were eventually forced out.

In Cleveland, OH Blacks protested and shut down four white McDonald's after the company refused to grant a franchise to Blacks. One McDonald's inflamed tensions when he said residents in the Black community lacked the skills to operate and manage a McDonald's.



According to several books, business at the McDonald's on Stony Island was not initially doing well because it was in the heart of the Blackstone Rangers youth gang territory.



This a similar style of a McDonald's restaurant that would have existed in 1968". This is not a photo of the first Black-owned McDonald's on Stony Island, but this is how it would have looked back then.(Photo courtesy of the Black McDonald's Operators Association).

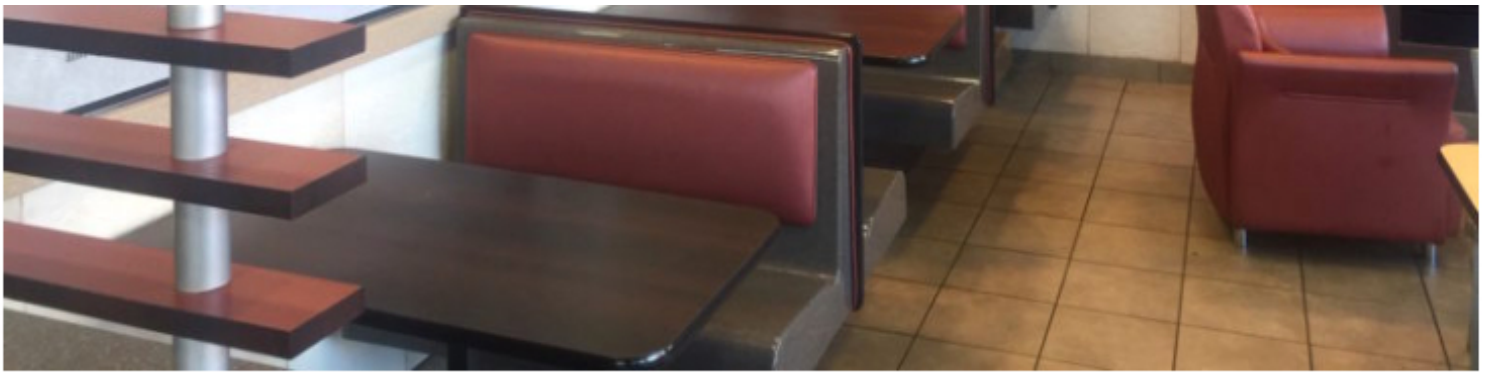
Blackstone Rangers youth gang territory. Petty said in Harris' book that after removing the gang members as employees, loiterers in the store became his first priority. In the book, "Building a Black Metropolis," Petty said he was able to "safely" remove gangs from his property because he had a relationship with them and their leader, Jeff Fort.

"Because I had a barbershop down the street, I knew everybody in the neighborhood and they knew me," he said. "I knew the kids and I knew their families, and I was able to get them all out of the store."

Kroc did not hire women at his McDonald's restaurants because he wanted to promote a family atmosphere without

"hanky panky" from male customers "hitting on" women. But Petty hired women in his first McDonald's.





A SECTION OF the renovated first Black-owned McDonalds includes a mural that honors the founder Herman Petty and the founding members of the Black McDonalds Operators Association (BMOA).

In 1969, McDonald's hired Roland Jones, its first Black consultant. Jones helped Petty increase sales at his first restaurant by 75 percent in its first year. That same year seven Black businessmen in Chicago purchased the second McDonald's owned by operators of color. By the end of 1969, there were 12-Black-owned restaurants.

One Black prominent McDonald's franchisee, former Xerox executive Blanton Canady once owned at least five restaurants. He now owns McDonald's restaurants at McCormick Place and another at Chicago's Navy Pier.

One of the most successful Black franchisees, the late millionaire Cirilo McSween, opened a McDonald's at 230 S. State Street in 1979 as one of 11 franchises. In 1983, the State Street McDonald's was the No.1 restaurant in the country, with \$4 million in annual sales, according to *Ebony* magazine. Before he was a McDonald's franchisee, McSween was an extremely successful insurance salesman, who sold at least \$1 million in insurance from his office in Bronzeville.

Another millionaire in Chicago, Mayoral Candidate Willie Wilson made his fortune from owning McDonald's franchises. After he was turned down, Wilson contacted Kroc, who helped him open his first franchise in



1980.

In 1972, Lee Dunham opened his first of seven franchises in New York's famed Harlem neighborhood.



Today, there are 65 Black-owned McDonald's franchises in Chicago, according to the Black McDonald's Operators Association, a tight knit group that Petty founded with several Black Chicagoans in 1970 to address the needs of Black-owned franchises. The other founding members were Walter Pitchford, Edward Wimp, Jr., Roland Jones, Lester Hairston (Alderman Leslie Hairston's father) and Noel White. Jones and Wimp are the only surviving members.

"They were the nucleus of the group," said Canady. "They just for in the business and found a need to help one another out."

That same year, Petty also founded the National Black McDonald's Operators Association, which according to its website, says there are over 330 Black McDonald's franchise owners. There are 14,428 McDonald's restaurants in America, according to McDonald's.

In 2006, Don Thompson, who first worked at the McDonald's on Stony Island, became the company's first Black President and CEO.

Petty died on March 21, 2009, but his legacy lives on through his historic ownership of the first Black-owned McDonald's.

Yolanda Travis is the fourth owner in the restaurant's 50 year history. Travis, who also owns the McDonald's franchise on 47th and Cottage Grove and one in Hyde Park reopened the Stony Island restaurant in 2008 to mark the 40th

in 1972, they reopened the Ebony Island restaurant in 2000 to mark the 10 anniversary of its historic opening. A section in the restaurant has a mural and timeline chronicling its history and pioneers. There are also two markers outside to educate generations about the significance of the McDonald's franchise, which will be in walking distance of the Obama Presidential Center and Library.

The original McDonald's had the company's signature large Golden Arches and was smaller.

To mark its 50th Anniversary, Travis said she plans to hold a special ceremony in 2019. She also plans to reach out to officials at the Obama Foundation to boost opportunities for her restaurant.

"I'm very excited," said Travis. "You have two major Black institutions here and they should be tied together."

Travis beams with pride when she talks about now owning the first Black-owned McDonald restaurant.

"I always wanted to own my business. I like being closely connected and being in touch with the community."

Looking to Advertise? Contact the Crusader for more information.



 Like 59

 Tweet

Previous article

Michael Jordan, Oprah, Jay Z among Blacks on Forbes' wealthiest celebrities list

Next article

\$1 houses awarded to owners in final lottery of 2018



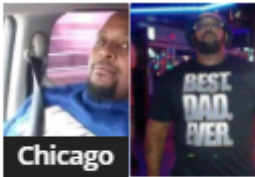
crusader



Comcast extends comprehensive COVID-19 Response Policies to June 30



'The Beer Jesus from America' looks at a bearded stranger in a beer country



Three people charged in killing of Family Dollar security guard over mask policy



LEAVE A REPLY

Comment:

Name:*

Email:*

Website:



I'm not a robot



reCAPTCHA
[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

POST COMMENT



GET THE PULSE NEWSLETTER ANYWHERE, ON THE GO!
SIGN UP TODAY!

WITH TOP HEADLINES YOU WANT TO SEE

Reaching more than 450,000 readers each week
Tapping the Pulse of the African-American Community.

THE
Crusader
NEWSPAPER
THE CHICAGO CRUSADER THE GARY CRUSADER

ABOUT US

The Crusader Newspaper Group consists of two weekly newspapers in Illinois and Indiana featuring news, commentary and life style reporting geared toward the African American community. The Chicago Crusader and Gary Crusader, published by minority media champion Dorothy R. Leavell, reach two unique markets with a shared \$47 billion (annual) consumer buying power.

FOLLOW US

CONTACT US

For news inquiries: news@chicagocrusader.com or
news@garycrusader.com

For advertising inquiries: ads@chicagocrusader.com or
ads@garycrusader.com

219-885-4357 Gary Office

773-752-2500 Chicago Office