

# Councilman Carter sees many changes in Centerville

**W**allace "Moe" Carter is a soft-spoken person at Centerville City Council meetings - belying the fact that he is a retired Marine major who saw combat in Vietnam and was one of those much-feared

drill sergeants, as well as having laid down the law as a county magistrate. Nor does he look the age to have gone into the Marines in 1955.

He'll need that composure learned through the years as he takes on another challenge. The newly-elected council member will be working with a budget that has been pummeled throughout this decade by growing costs and dwindling revenues. But it will be just one more of many challenges - just what Carter says he enjoys.

His very first challenge was just being himself - a black youth growing up in the 1940s and '50s - when the Courthouse had segregated water fountains, blacks were restricted to the balcony at the movie theater and they could only use the municipal swimming pool after hours or on Sunday.

**Wallace "Moe" Carter at a Centerville City Council meeting**



Carter says his memories of those times are still mostly good, playing in schools sports and having a number of white friends. It was his parents, he says, that would speak of earlier and harsher times in Centerville.

"I recall hearing them talk about where they could go to drink and where they had to use the back door," he says.

Still, Carter does recall one night as a 4 year old when all the lights in the

house were turned off because of a Klu Klux Klan rally.

He also remembers a Mr. Jennings, a prosperous white businessman who took him under his wings. He gave Carter work doing odd jobs and yard work. He'd also would send him to a clothing store where he'd be "suited up," all put on Jennings charge account.

Carter left school before graduating. He joined the

Marines. Once in the infantry, he says, color wasn't an issue because soldiers have to depend upon one another.

He used his time in the military to also get a high school diploma and then a Bachelors Degree. He was stationed in a number of places around the world, including seeing combat in Vietnam.

One of his most outstanding memories was during a firefight in Vietnam. While leading a platoon as an officer commissioned from the ranks, his group was ambushed. The platoon hit the ground. Carter looked over to see a recruit smiling at him in confidence. Carter had been the Marine's drill sergeant back in the States.

If you couldn't trust your drill sergeant to get you out of a mess, who could you trust?

After 39 years in the Marines, he retired and returned to Centerville. Times had changed. In 1984 he became a magistrate. He says the most interesting and challenging cases were the civil suits.

In 2004, he became the director of the Appanoose County Veterans Affairs Office.

Carter decided to run

for the City Council in 2007.

"I'd been asked to run several times," he says, "but I always declined.

Carter then said he thought about how it wasn't fair to be ready with criticism and not be willing to do something about it. Running unopposed, he is now Centerville's first black on the City Council.

"I just want to try and make Centerville a better place to live," he says.

**But it will be just one more of many challenges - just what Carter says he enjoys.**

**By Dan Ehl  
Managing Editor**

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