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By Sonny Long ()

Aug. 1, 2013 at 3:01 a.m.

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### Jamison Funeral Home closes its doors

The more than 100-year-old, family-owned Jamison Funeral Home in Yoakum closed on July 31. It's the oldest black-owned business in South Texas. Funeral director Mrs. Curtis Jamison talks about her family's legacy, the funeral business and life in Yoakum.

(/videos/2013/aug/01/9894/)



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YOAKUM - Curtis Jamison has seen a lot of death, but she's also lived a lot of life.

Jamison, 83, closed the doors on the more than 100-year-old family-owned Jamison Funeral Home on Wednesday.

"I'm not as sad as I thought I'd be," said the widow of the grandson of the man who founded the African-American-owned business as she settled in at her desk, dog Pip never far away.

"He used to be named Pipsqueak, but he grew," she said of her constant companion. "I talk to him just like I talk to a person."

The Jamison family's longevity in the business community - the oldest black-owned business in South Texas at the time it closed - is based on the philosophy of the founder, Mack Jamison, she said.

"He was a gentleman; he was honest, and he was caring," she said. "That's been our theme throughout: 'Do it just like he did it.'"

Another facet of the Jamisons and the business is their involvement in Yoakum.

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## JAMISON FUNERAL HOME

Jamison Funeral Home in Yoakum spawned additional funeral homes in Cuero, Hallettsville, Waelder and Luling.

### Timeline

- 1906 - Mack Jamison, a barber, begins "laying out" the deceased.
- 1929 - Jamison opens funeral home in new building. His wife,

"We believe that you not only had to be in the community, but of the community," said Jamison. "To contribute."

Bill Lopez, director of the Yoakum Area Chamber of Commerce and Yoakum Rotary Club member, said, "We're very fortunate to have Curtis Jamison in our community."

Yoakum Mayor Annie Rodriguez was equal in her praise of the Jamison family.

"The Jamison family has always been involved in our community. Mr. (M.C.) Jamison followed in his father's footsteps, being active in our community and helping many people," the mayor said.

Jamison also has given back to the community. She has helped many in need, raised her children and fostered many children.

She is active in her church, playing the organ and serving as a Sunday school teacher.

She also served on the Yoakum City Council for many years.

"She is a very kind and loveable person," the mayor said.

Amanda Lillian Jamison, and son, Maceo Ted Jamison, were also licensed embalmers.

- 1957 - M.C. Jamison, Mack's grandson, takes over operations with his wife, Curtis Jamison, and their son, Michael Jamison.

- 1971 - Michael Jamison becomes licensed funeral director/embalmer. He died April 13, 2013, at age 63.

- 1990 - Curtis Jamison becomes licensed funeral director/embalmer.

- July 31, 2013 - Funeral home closes.

Jamison was appointed to the council in January 1991 and served until May 1999.

She also served on the Golden Crescent Regional Planning Commission for more than eight years.

The after-school program Jamison conducts at Mack Jamison Park and the M.C. Jamison Youth Center has been in place since 2006. It is a joint partnership with the city, which donated the building, and the Yoakum Rotary Club.

"This program is so needed for our children," Lopez said, noting that other businesses, organizations and individuals help fund the program.

"Through her after-school program, she has helped teach so many kids what young adults should be learning," he said.

The program is special to Jamison, too.

"I'll be with the kids, even if I have to go in a wheelchair," she said.

In 2005, Jamison was awarded the chamber's Paul F. Gustwick Award for outstanding community service.

In 2009, the Yoakum Rotary Club honored her with a Paul Harris Fellow for her humanitarian projects.



**WE**



She has been active in the A.M.E. church both in Yoakum, where her late daughter Karen Jamison was pastor, and now at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Shiner.

"We were always active politically and socially and contributed to whatever causes came up," Jamison said.

The Jamisons also led the integration efforts in Yoakum in the 1960s. A lawsuit in that legal battle even bears Karen Jamison's name.

### Industry changes

The funeral home business has witnessed some changes since Mack Jamison first "laid out" dead people at his barber shop on Front Street.

"They didn't embalm," said Jamison. "They just dressed the person, laid him out, then buried him in whatever he was going to be buried in. Took him, probably by horse and carriage, to the cemetery."

Jamison said she recalled her husband telling her about seeing his father go to a house, take a door down and put it on sawhorses.

"They'd do the embalming right there by gravity flow."

She said embalming progressed through the years, and she learned using a dutronic embalmer, which has now also been surpassed by new technology.

### **Growing up Yoakum**

"Yoakum is a unique community," Jamison said. "Even through the segregation years, we all lived together. We never had incidents like other places had."

She said it was an ideal place to be brought up.

"It made you into something that would benefit the community. You were brought up to work and be honest, and it stuck with you."

The funeral home's client base through the years mostly came from the black community, she said.

The business' success and longevity is something Jamison has always been proud of.

"It was such a heritage for black people that something could last. We kept the name going. We don't have that anymore," she said.

"It's a source of real pride. It's just now getting to the point where demographics have changed, things have changed, people have changed. And we just haven't

been able to keep up because it's not economical for us to do it."

The 1946 graduate of Asbury High School in Yoakum said they were the last black-owned business in Yoakum. "That part is sad."

Jamison plans to put the funeral home building, built in 1929, up for sale the day after she closes the doors.

"It has always been a landmark and still will be in their minds if the building is here or it isn't," she said.


"People will still remember us - and remember us fondly."

Jamison won't stay retired long.

She has accepted a part-time position with Thiele-Cooper Funeral Home in Yoakum.

"They said I could do what I want to, when I want to and if I want to. Now that's the kind of job I've been looking for all my life," Jamison said. "It's a shame, I ain't got too much time left to do it."

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