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## Sacramento lobbyist honored for contributions to black community

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***Published 6:36 am PDT Thursday, April 3, 2008***

Mel Assagai, a longtime Sacramento African American activist and political player, has been awarded the Observer Media Group's Medallion of Honor, given to the real "heroes and 'sheroes'" of Sacramento's black community.

A former Sacramento City College campus activist and Sacramento Bee reporter, Assagai, 59, is now a Sacramento-based lobbyist for Strategic Counsel PLC, a Los Angeles law firm representing educational, municipal, corporate and nonprofit clients, including the Greater Sacramento Urban League, the National Association of Women Business Owners and the Sacramento Black Chamber, where Assagai also serves on the board.

Assagai graduated from Hiram Johnson High School and went on to become president of the Black Student Union at Sacramento City College, "working to expand minority access to all public universities and colleges," he said. "There were very, very few minorities at any of these institutions in the late 1960s. At almost every level, we fought to redistribute, social, educational and political opportunities -- that's what motivated a lot of young people at that time."

He transferred to California State University, Sacramento, and worked for three years as a reporter for the Sacramento Observer, an African American-owned newspaper.

"I was recruited by The Bee in 1971 and worked there for 10 years," Assagai said. He covered education, energy, features and politics before leaving in 1981 to spend a decade working for Sen. David Roberti, D-Hollywood, who was leader of the state Senate.

Assagai, whose son Caliph was student body president at UC Davis in 2006 and hopes to one day run for office in Sacramento, remarked, "It's a very exciting time for African Americans in Sacramento because there are more young people running for more offices more often, and there's a heightened sense of political consciousness about what it takes to achieve change through the political system."

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