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PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**NOMINATION FORM
HALF MILE OF HISTORY**

Section A: Nomination Information

Name of Nominated person, place or event: Willie Neal Johnson

The nominee is being honored for outstanding contributions in the area(s) of (please check all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/Media	<input type="checkbox"/> Philanthropy
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Government/Military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Arts and Culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science
<input type="checkbox"/> Aviation	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention/Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/> Sports
<input type="checkbox"/> Business/Corporate Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Oil/Gas	

Section B: Nominator's Information

Name of person making nomination: Stanley Cofer / Empowerment Community Development Corporation

Address: 2408 Riviera Dr

City: Tyler State: TX Zip: 75707

Daytime telephone: 903-714-9127 Email: Stanley Cofer

Relationship to nominated individual: None

Nominated Individual's year of birth: 1935 Nominated Individual's year of death: 2001

Section C: Narrative

The narrative section of the application is the most important. It is the primary source of information judges use to make their selection of new inductees. The two-page narrative submittal must utilize size 12 Times New Roman font and be double spaced. Please include a recommended 25-30 word marker caption at the end of the narrative. Any additional material will be referred to only for verification of accuracy of the nomination. No submitted materials will be returned.

The narrative section must contain an explanation of the nominee's enduring contribution that make this person/place/event worthy of the honor. Please describe the impact the nominee has had on the community, county, region, nation and/or world. For Individuals, please include any honors earned by the nominee as well as a list of organizations in which the nominee has been involved. Also, please indicate their educational background as well as the length of time the individual has lived in Smith County. Inclusion of photos is preferred but optional. Do not send original photos. All submitted materials will become property of the City of Tyler and its Historical Preservation Board.

Please submit nominations to:
City of Tyler Historical Preservation Board
Attention: Half Mile of History
P.O. Box 2039
Tyler, Texas 75710

Willie Neal Johnson

Willie Neal Johnson (1935–2001) was a gospel singer who became known as "Country Boy" for his rootsy blues-driven style and his down to earth friendly personality. Willie was born in Tyler, Texas on August 25, 1935 he was the oldest of six children in a musical family. After his father died when he was 14 so he quit school to go to work to support his mother & younger siblings. His mother motivated her children to pursue their singing careers by taking them to church and making them sing on Sundays. One of the outstanding gospel performers of all times, Willie started singing at an early age, while in his teens he was tapped to join Rev. C. W. Jackson's group the Five Ways of Joy Gospel Singers. A few years later he formed Willie Neal Johnson and the Gospel Keynotes with long-time friends, Ralph McGee, Rev. J. D. Talley, Charles Bailey, John Jackson, Lonzo Jackson, and Archie B. McGee. After rising to popularity across the Southwest, the group signed to Nashboro Records where they scored a major hit with Show Me the Way. They received a Grammy nomination in 1980 for Aint No Stoppin' Us Now. The Gospel Keynotes went on to record over 20 LPs for Nashboro.

In 1985 after Nashboro closed its doors, they signed to the Malaco Music label located in Jackson, MS. where they changed their name to Willie Neal Johnson and the New Keynotes. With Malaco they recorded seven albums. They were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame in Detroit and the American Gospel Quartet Hall of Fame in Birmingham, Alabama in 1999. The group, particularly known for "That's My Son," received gospel's coveted Stellar Awards for "Lord Take Us Through" and "The Country Boy Goes Home" and was nominated for "The Country Boy Goes Home II.

Mr. Johnson's last recording was an appearance on Kirk Franklin's The Rebirth of Kirk Franklin in 2000 on the song Lookin' Out for Me. Willie died of a stroke on January 10, 2001 at

the age of 65 in Tyler, Texas. Their music can be heard on radio stations and found in music stores and on-line as they remain popular artists of the 21th century. Johnson was among the first to combine Quartet Groups and Gospel Choirs for a new sound aka "choirtet" that proved to be a hit as with The Mississippi Mass Choir. That concept is still going strong today. "Lord, Take Us Through", with special guest Evangelist Dorothy Norwood, hit Billboard's Top 25. Willie Neal Johnson performed to sold out crowds in every section of the U.S.A.

Willie Neal Johnson is a household name all over the United States. Upon his death it was reported in newspapers all over America.

Mr. Johnson never moved his residence from Tyler, TX and was proud to proclaim that he was from the beautiful city of roses. When you mention Willie Neal Johnson people automatically identify him with Tyler. At his concerts he would be introduced as Willie Neal Johnson and the Gospel Keynotes of Tyler, TX. When Malaco Records asked him to do a live recording his request was to be able to do it in his hometown. Mr. Johnson was a professional and he paved the way for many other artists. I had the opportunity to attend several of his concerts. He was responsible for bringing some of the largest gospel concerts with many of the top gospel artists to Tyler. Mr. Johnson is a legend in gospel music and continues to inspire many. Just as Mr. Johnson was proud of his hometown we in return should be proud of the great accomplishments he made in the gospel music industry.

Marker Caption:

Willie Neal Johnson founder & lead Gospel Singer of the Keynotes who won numerous awards and is an inductee in the Gospel Music & the Gospel Quartet Halls of Fame .