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"HONORED AND BLESSED TO BE INVOLVED WITH THIS PROJECT"

Dr. Norman Francis: A Legacy of Leadership

Sally-Ann Roberts, Narrator

By Anita Oubre

During her illustrious career in broadcast journalism, Sally-Ann Roberts met and worked with many dignitaries over the years. Among the foremost of those dignitaries was Dr. Norman Francis who served as President of Xavier University from 1968 to 2015 and is a prominent community leader and innovator.

Sally-Ann said she is "thrilled" to work on the new WYES-Channel 12 documentary that pays tribute to the life and legacy of Dr. Francis. "I was very fortunate that Dominic Massa (the Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of WYES) asked me to be the narrator for the project," she began. "It was a

pleasure working with him, as well as producers Dionne Butler and Thanh Truong," all three of whom she worked with during her long career as a reporter and co-host of WWL-TV Channel 4's Eyewitness Morning News.

"Everyone who is working on this has a sense of purpose that this is important. Everyone who is connected with this production is giving it one hundred percent because of Dr. Francis's legacy," Sally-Ann added.

Noting that Dr. Francis was one of the first people she met after her arrival at Channel 4, Sally-Ann has fond memories

of her earliest meetings with him. “I was a young reporter just starting out in the business and I was as green as could be,” she recalled. “I was not from New Orleans and I was not aware who the movers and shakers in New Orleans were. Dr. Francis was very kind and patient with me and he took the time to explain what was going on in the city back then. He was very generous in sharing his vast knowledge.

“So it is an honor and a blessing for me to be involved with this documentary project,” she continued. “We are all grateful for the work that Dr. Francis has done over the years, from business to education to civic involvement.”

Because of the instances of prejudice she experienced first-hand, Sally-Ann is especially grateful for the trailblazing civil rights leadership that Dr. Francis exemplified and the landmark events in which he was key participant.

As a young lawyer, Dr. Francis was involved in housing a group of Freedom Riders in a dormitory at Xavier University. While participating in a bus trip to protest segregated terminals throughout the South in the early 1960s, their bus had been fire-bombed by segregationists in Alabama and there was fear that more violence would erupt. Dr. Francis was taking a serious risk aiding these young civil rights activists.



Sally-Ann with Dr. Norman Francis

“I’m probably part of the last generation to remember the so-called ‘separate but equal’ era,” Sally-Ann said. “I can remember being turned away from restaurants with my parents in Iowa. I remember being turned away from hotels in Minnesota. Segregation was not limited to the South. They put up signs in the North also. I remember my parents telling me how I complained that everyone else in a restaurant was being served and I questioned why weren’t they bringing us a menu. Dr. Francis was one of the people who

sacrificed everything to make this a better world for all of us. It means a lot to me because I lived through that era.

“All of the things that he has done from the ‘60s to the present day is mind-boggling,” Sally-Ann continued. “What he accomplished and is still accomplishing in his life is extraordinary. This is a good time for this documentary to be presented so that the public can understand the tremendous debt that we owe to Dr. Francis. It will remind us all that we must remain vigilant to keep the rights that were fought so hard for.”

Sally-Ann herself has played a huge role in New Orleans over the past four decades. She is a friendly, familiar face that New Orleanians trusted to bring them the news during her long tenure at WWL-TV. Starting her career as a city hall reporter, Sally-Ann spent 41 years at the television station. Along with Eric Paulsen, she co-anchored one of the highest-rated morning shows in the country for 26 years before retiring in 2018.

Widely known for her warm demeanor and her ability to build and captivate her audiences, Sally-Ann had a wide following throughout the Gulf South region. Every morning on the show viewers looked forward to the special birthday shout-outs



Sally-Ann with sisters Robin Roberts (l.) and Dorothy Roberts (r.)
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(l. to r.) April Dupre, Leslie Spoon, Eric Paulsen, Sally-Ann Roberts, Sheba Turk and Dave Nussbaum at Sally-Ann's retirement party



Thanh Truong and Sally-Ann Roberts



Sally-Ann celebrates her retirement from Channel 4 with family, co-workers and friends in February 2018



Founders of Each One Save One, Cathy Harris and Sally-Ann Roberts

she would give and the human-interest stories that she would present. She made sure that the extraordinary acts ordinary people accomplished were celebrated in her popular segment "Quiet Hero."

There are many charities that Sally-Ann has contributed to over the years. She co-founded "Each One Save One, an organization that provides mentorship to vulnerable youth. She has also received many accolades and awards over the years including the Blue Ribbon Award from Louisiana Center for Women for her work with Eyewitness Morning News. She has

been recognized by the Youth Leadership Council, YWCA, Junior League and Kiwanis International, to name a few.

Sally-Ann is the author of three books, "Your Power is On: A Little Book of Hope" which is an uplifting book of encouragements and inspirational messages. Another title, "Going Live, An Anchorwoman Reports Good News," is a collection of inspirational messages that proves miracles are real occurrences. The book's foreword was penned by Sally-Ann's famous TV journalist sister, Robin Roberts.

She also wrote a novel titled "Angel Vision" that celebrates the healing power of God. Continuing her love of writing, Sally-Ann is currently working on a children's book along with her brother. The book will pay homage to their mother and the gift of song that she so lovingly shared throughout her lifetime.

Sally-Ann has also enjoyed hosting The Good Morning Show on WBOK radio and she looks forward to working with journalist Monica Pierre on a new show called "Your Power is On" which talks about living a purpose-driven life.

"We all have a purpose-driven life; this is no accident. We are all here for a reason in every stage of life, whether you are a young person or an older person like me," Sally-Ann reflected. "In every season there is work to do. Recognize your gifts and share them with the world." ❧

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