

One day when **Ezzard C. White** was nine years old, he was summoned to the sickbed of his father, T.L. Lee, a World War II veteran, aviation engineer and mechanic who, with his wife I.D. Lee, were living in Leland, MS with their 14 children. At the time, Ezzard said he did not fully understand that his father was dying and wanted to impart an important message to his eighth child.

With great effort, his ailing father told Ezzard that he was going to be somebody. After regaining his breath, T.L. went on to say that Ezzard already was somebody.

He was his son. "Dad and I were very close," Ezzard said. "Soon after he died I got a job as a paper boy and since then I have always had a job." During summer vacations, Ezzard shined shoes and did other jobs. His mother went to work for Sears to provide for her family.

At Leland High School, Ezzard lettered in football and baseball. He also competed in the long and high jumps during track season. He graduated in 1976 and was accepted to Mississippi Valley State University, a historically black university. Ezzard paid his tuition with the money he had saved since the age of 9, and by working

on campus during school. While attending college, Ezzard became a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He earned a bachelor of science degree in vocational industrial technology with a specialty in electricity and electronics in May 1980, and was successfully recruited by the Milwaukee Public Schools system, becoming the first African American vocational teacher in electricity at Milwaukee Technical & Trade High School (now Bradley Tech).

Within a short time after his arrival in Milwaukee, Ezzard founded EWS Electric & Industrial Trucking & Traffic Control. After 15 years with the Milwaukee Public Schools system, he left to work for himself full time. With more free time, Ezzard began to notice the number of school-age youth walking around during the weekday. Sometimes when he was working on a house, Ezzard said people would stop him and ask if he had any work with which they could help. "Some even asked questions about how to get into the business," he said. "Slowly the realization dawned on me that I could teach them skills that would last for a lifetime. My commitment and enthusiasm grew as I saw the difference it made for people."

Ezzard created a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization named "One Hope Made Strong (OHMS)." Tuition cost is minimal for the 12-week program which meets three times a week and includes training in nine skilled building and trade categories: electrical fundamentals; conduit bending and basic wiring; electrical circuitry; general drafting and blueprint reading; building structures and foundations; carpentry; plumbing; heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC) and refrigeration; and welding. The OHMS program is funded almost entirely by Ezzard. It meets at St. Francis of Assisi Church on North 4th Street.

"There are thousands of Milwaukee residents that want to work and are willing to learn," Ezzard said. "All they need is a little encouragement."

Ezzard credited Nathan Conyers, founder of *The Milwaukee Times Weekly Newspaper*, with providing him with advice and encouragement. "He is a mentor to me and the business wisdom he has shared with me has helped my own business and teaching program to thrive." Graduates from the OHMS program have worked on the new Northwestern Mutual Tower and the Milwaukee Bucks Arena. Other graduates are working for Roman Electric and Staff Electric.

He said he corresponds with former students regularly. Completing the program and earning certification



Ezzard C. White

One Hope Made Strong Program

tion can open the door to a stable, middle-class life for an entire family.

Ezzard's wife, Barbara Johnson, died 12 years ago. Ezzard is a member of

Ebenezer Church of God in Christ. His family includes two adult daughters (Shameka and Shantell) and grandson Demetrius.

