

Henry Lee Coleman

2023 Hometown Hero

Bio

Henry Lee Coleman was born December 6, 1935 in Dinwiddie County. He is the sixth of seven children born to Erasmus and Rosa Coleman. Mr. Coleman was educated in Dinwiddie and graduated from Southside High School in 1955.

Erasmus Coleman was a farmer, and when he passed in 1950, Henry and his mother took over the farming operation. When Rosa Coleman passed in 1979, Henry assumed full responsibility for the farm, as none of his siblings had an interest in farming.

In addition to farming, Mr. Coleman worked at Central State Hospital. This is where he met his wife Jean DeWitt Coleman. After they were married, the new Mrs. Coleman left her home in Petersburg to begin her life on the farm. They raised peanuts, tobacco, soybeans, and corn. Together, they had six children: Wesley, Leslie, Cassandra, Valetta, Henry Jr., and Latrice. Mr. and Mrs. Coleman now have seven grandchildren.

Farming is tough, but being an African-American farmer was even more so. Securing FHA loans as an African American farmer was challenging. Mr. Coleman credits B.T. Hargrave for helping him through those challenging times. B.T. Hargrave allowed farmers to purchase on credit with payment due following the harvest.

Henry Coleman is 87 years old and has seen more than his fair share of changes over the past 72 years of farming. When he and his mom took over the farm in 1950, they had two horses and a plow. Today, Mr. Coleman enjoys modern equipment, which includes an air-conditioned tractor and a combine.

Mr. and Mrs. Coleman are members of Mt. Level Baptist Church in Dinwiddie where Mr. Coleman serves as an usher. In 2020, Mt. Level recognized Henry Coleman as the “Oldest Black Farmer in Dinwiddie County”. In 2022, he travelled to Mississippi to receive the “Oldest Black Farmer” award from the National Black Farmers Association.

At 87 years old, Henry Lee Coleman continues to do what he loves. Today, he single-handedly farms 87 acres of soybeans. He shared that he has good friends in the community that help as needed. According to those who know him, Mr. Coleman has always been first to lend a helping hand to support other small farmers.

His days begin early and end late, but he always finds time in the evenings to watch television. He enjoys watching westerns, and Jimmy Kimmel. On the rare day off, he enjoys taking Mrs. Coleman shopping. Mr. Coleman is also an avid sports fan. His favorite football teams are the Philadelphia Eagles and the Dinwiddie Generals. He especially enjoys attending Dinwiddie Generals games, and traveled to Liberty University to see them clinch the State Championship this year.

Henry Lee Coleman is known throughout Dinwiddie County as a kind man. He is a mentor and friend to many and looks at every situation with a positive attitude, always helping others when he can. Faith, family, and farming keep Mr. Coleman strong and are the reason he is able to continue his labor of love.

It is an honor to recognize Henry Lee Coleman as Dinwiddie County’s 2023 Hometown Hero.