

## The Khaliq file

**Name:** Nathaniel Khaliq

**Age:** 67

**Grew up in:** St. Paul

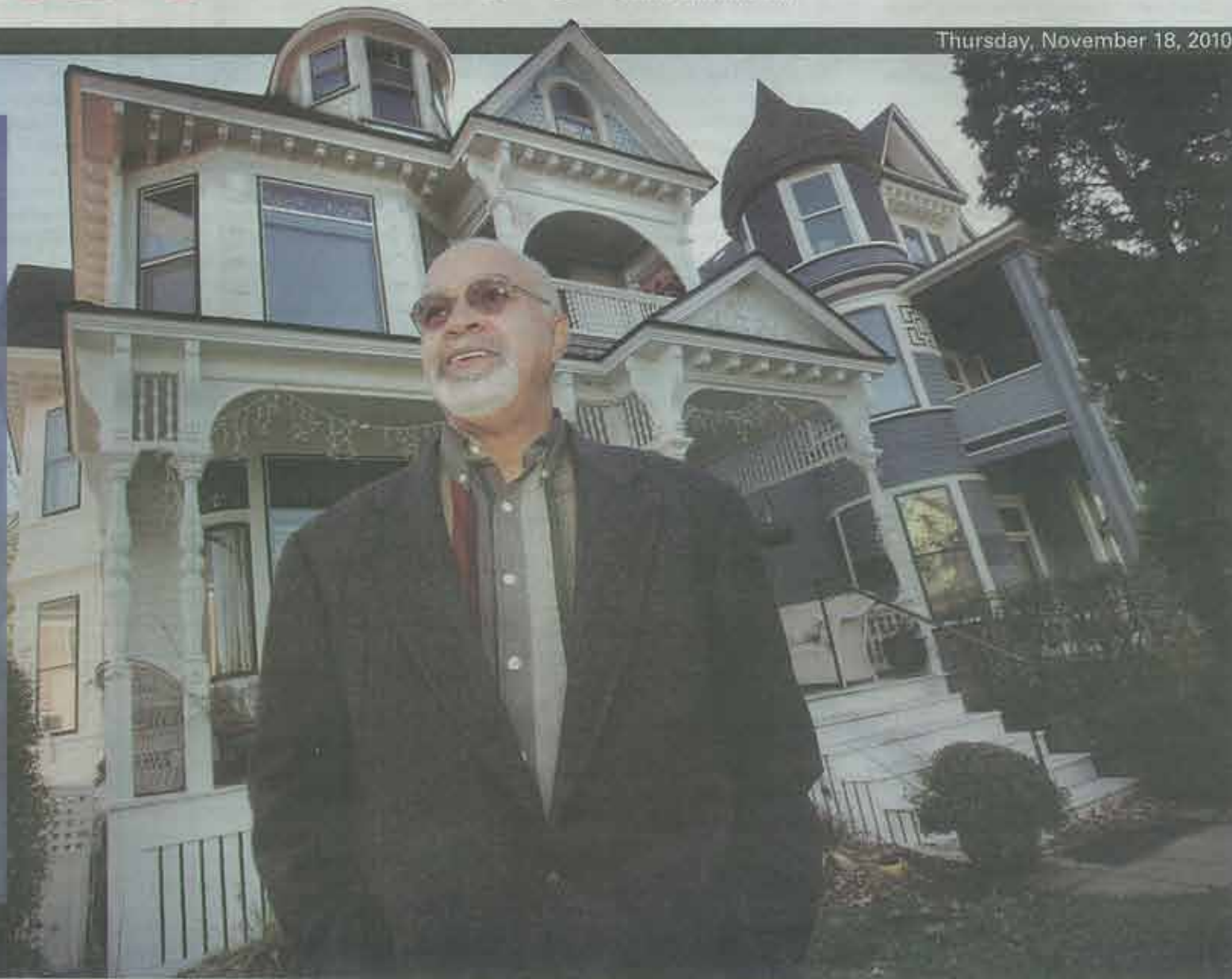
**Lives in:** Summit-University

**Job:** Outgoing president, St. Paul NAACP, retired in 2001 as a St. Paul firefighter. Former St. Paul construction company owner.

**Family:** Married to Victoria Davis, 35 years; seven children, three with Victoria, 13 grandchildren, with a 14th coming in December.

**Hobbies:** "I enjoy being around the grandkids. I like to go out into the woods—we have a cabin to try Coosy. I like to travel."

**About his name change:** Khaliq, whose birth name was Nick Davis, converted to Islam in the 1970s and adopted his Muslim name in the mid-1990s. "But almost everyone still refers to him as 'Nick'."



Nathaniel Khaliq, 67, stands in front of the house on Hague Avenue in St. Paul's Summit-University neighborhood that he and his wife have lived in since the 1970s. Many people credit Khaliq with being an integral part of saving the neighborhood from thugs. Not that the thugs didn't try to force them out: The Khaliq family and the house survived multiple violent incidents. (Staff photo: Bill Klotz)

# Mr. Khaliq's neighborhood

Outgoing St. Paul NAACP head fought both the thugs and the establishment to clean up Summit-University

BY KEVIN FEATHERLY

Special to Capitol Report

Nathaniel Khaliq was at work the night a firebomb landed on his Hague Avenue porch 21 years ago—but his wife and their three kids were inside, sleeping.

That they weren't killed that night—Nov. 29, 1989—came down to a combination of fresh snow, an alert neighbor and an assailant with a bad throwing arm.

The burning Molotov cocktail bounced off a rail and landed short of the bay window that was its target, spilling flame on the snow-covered porch. An observant neighbor called 911 and ran over to the house to wake up Khaliq's wife, Victoria, and their kids.

Their lives and home were spared.

This wasn't the only time that Khaliq, 67, the outgoing president of the St. Paul NAACP, was targeted over the years because of his battle against the gangs, drugs and violence that once dominated the Summit-University neighborhood.

But due in no small part to his efforts, they no longer do.

And Khaliq's battles weren't always against the bad guys: He has both assisted and agitated against the police and the city over the years, urging leaders against "over-policing and under-protecting" St. Paul's communities of color.

He worked with the University of St. Thomas' Community Justice Project (CJP) in 2006, convincing former St.

"My people have got a right to justice free from fear and harassment and brutality, whether it's from the police or even if it's from one of our own. That's the basic fact."

Paul City Attorney John Choi—the newly elected Ramsey County Attorney—to reduce the number of African-Americans being prosecuted on obstruction of legal process charges, a tactic Khaliq says was little more than a way to sweep black youths off the street.

He also worked with CJP to successfully challenge the way names get compiled in the law enforcement database, GangNet. That effort led former Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher to purge 6,000 names from the database. (St. Paul Police Commander Matt Bostrom was elected Ramsey County Sheriff on Nov. 2, denying Fletcher a fifth term.)

As leader of the local NAACP, Khaliq is party to a lawsuit that seeks to force the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration and the Metropolitan Council to do a thorough analysis of the impact of the Central Corridor light rail transit project on the communities of color—mainly African-American and Hmong—that live along the route.

In December, Khaliq will step down from the NAACP presidency he has held since 1993. St. Paul attorney Jeffrey Martin, 41, will replace him.

"It's time for some new ideas, fresh minds, fresh legs, a new set of eyes and a whole other level of commitment to get involved and see if we can keep this thing afloat," Khaliq says.

### Forced out

Khaliq is a living link to the days when St. Paul's African-American community, while generally poor, was also generally happy, he says.

"We were a self-contained community that was really a village," Khaliq says of the Rondo neighborhood. "It was self-sustaining. Even the drunks and those that were on the negative side of life were respectful of the community."

Things changed dramatically in 1956, when Khaliq was a 13-year-old living with his grandparents. The federal government wanted to build Interstate 94 right down Rondo Avenue, and his family's home was in its path—as were the homes

of many African-American families.

The Rev. George Davis, Khaliq's grandfather, refused to leave his house until he, his wife and young Nick Davis—Khaliq's birth name—were forced out.

Khaliq came home from school one day to see his grandfather being led away and workmen chopping holes in the walls and floors. "They wanted to make it uninhabitable," Khaliq says.

The family was placed in an apartment near the present site of Region's Hospital. It had about 30 steps from the street to the residence, and Rev. Davis was in his 80s. He died within the year.

Khaliq moved in with his mother, eventually settling into the Mount Airy housing projects on Arch Street just north of downtown St. Paul along 35E. It was a deeply impoverished, unfamiliar, unsettling neighborhood.

The experience embittered Khaliq.

He started stealing cars and doing drugs. He served time in the Boys Totem Town reformatory, but got out and managed to graduate from St. Paul's Mechanic Arts High School. Khaliq later joined the Marines, serving a few years before getting out just as things started heating up in Vietnam.

In 1964, Khaliq returned home to St. Paul and started hanging out on Selby Avenue, where he says he became a streetwise "knucklehead."

But the Marine Corps had left him with some sense of discipline, and so by 1970,

# Khaliq Leader of the St. Paul NAACP is stepping down, but won't stop fighting for what's right

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after a few listless years, Khaliq was holding down two jobs—one as an Ideal Security Corp. quality control inspector, the other at a local liquor store.

That latter job wasn't entirely on the up-and-up, however: He was delivering booze to bootleggers who ran illegal after-hours clubs. While doing that, he got busted on a firearms charge and was sentenced to 30 days in jail.

It would be Khaliq's last brush with the law.

Khaliq decided to get his life together: He converted to Islam, and enrolled at St. Paul Technical College to become a carpenter. By the mid-1970s, he owned his own construction company and had procured a number of contracts with the city of St. Paul.

In 1975, he married his wife, Victoria, who has a master's degree in business administration. As the couple's finances and family grew, they began acquiring and managing properties around the Summit-University neighborhood.

In 1981, he left construction to become a firefighter. "I started out just to encourage my cousin to do it," he says. But as he trained, he got more interested. He took and passed the test. At age 40, he was a fireman. He held that job until retiring in 2001.

## The basic fact

If Khaliq's personal fortunes had turned for the better, those of his neighborhood had not. By the 1970s, the intersection of Selby and Dale was a war zone. Three of Khaliq's friends and relatives got murdered there—among many others.

One, a boyhood friend named Leroy Parker, was stabbed in broad daylight and allowed to bleed to death. "It wasn't a big deal," Khaliq says bitterly.

When his cousin, 17-year-old Darrell Crews, was shot and killed there, Khaliq's anger reached a boiling point. Murders, proliferating drug houses and spreading crime gangs did little to outrage either his own community or the people in power, he says.

Khaliq began agitating for police and city leaders to clean up Summit-University. He was told little could be done. So he took matters into his own hands.

First, he gathered 500 signatures in a petition drive against a neighborhood bar that had become a problem spot for violent crime. The petition was presented to the City Council, and the bar eventually was closed.

He later helped organize one of the metro area's first block clubs, and became president of the Summit-University Planning Council.

By 1985, the name Nick Davis—Khaliq didn't adopt his Muslim name until the mid-1990s—was a regular feature in contemporary newsprint.

He helped get new affordable housing units built. He started slipping notes under the doors of crack houses, telling those inside that they had 72 hours to shut down. He confronted members of Chicago's El Rukn gang and suggested they leave town.

"I was looking at justice," Khaliq says. "My people have got a right to justice free from fear and harassment and brutality, whether it's from the police or even if it's from one of our own. That's the basic fact."

St. Paul Police Chief Tom Smith has had many interactions with Khaliq over the years, and a substantial number of disagreements.

"Has Nick always been on our side for every type of thing that we do here in the police department? Absolutely not," Smith says. Nonetheless, he holds Khaliq in high esteem. "You need a Nathaniel Khaliq."

Smith in particular recalls one warm Sunday afternoon in the late 1980s when two young men were shot at Selby and Dale. One died at the scene, and Smith was desperately helping the other shooting victim, whose intestines were spilling out onto the pavement.

Onlookers were aghast and outraged. Tensions built against the cops on the scene.

Khaliq, a trusted presence in the neighborhood, arrived and calmed the crowd. "He has done that throughout his career," Chief Smith says.

Bill Wilson, the former city council member from Ward 1, beat Khaliq in a heated three-way race for that seat in 1989, but the two afterwards became allies. Wilson credits Khaliq for being among the first to stand up against the thugs that threatened to destroy Summit-University.

"He rallied people, really quite effectively," Wilson says. "He knew that things didn't really have to go that way. He knew that if he sat it out, there would just be these new guys on the block and they'd be running things."

Summit-University today is not a perfect neighborhood. But it's now possi-

ble to see businesses springing up along Selby from Lexington to Dale.

It's also possible to see African-American children playing in the snow along Hague Avenue without a care in the world—and without the distraction of gangsters in fancy cars tossing money onto the street to draw them into that life.

And the house on Hague Avenue, which someone tried to firebomb 21 years ago? It still stands—and Khaliq and his wife still live there.

Many folks credit Khaliq for helping make that all possible. "Nick was a driving force," Smith says.

"I think the important thing was that he stood his ground on what was right," Wilson adds. "It drew flak from both sides. But usually when you are standing up for what's right, that's what happens."

Khaliq will remain on the local NAACP's board after he steps down as president, and he plans to continue speaking out if his community is dealt with unjustly. His only regret, he says, is that he still has to.

"I'm 67 years old, and I thought that when I got to this point in my life that there wouldn't be the wide disparity between black and white that there is in Minnesota," he says.

He notes that the Twin Cities recently was identified as having the widest employment disparity between whites and blacks in the nation. "I'm saying, damn! Where are we at?"

So the fight goes on. But at least Khaliq doesn't have to worry about his house getting fire-bombed.

Well, probably not.

## Standing tall

The November 1989 firebombing of his Hague Avenue home was not Nathaniel Khaliq's only brush with danger or intimidation during his years as a neighborhood activist.

"[Khaliq] rallied people to say that we have a right to not have thugs and drugs running the community," says former St. Paul City Council member Bill Wilson. "He put himself out as a spokesperson, and therefore as a target. And he was targeted."

One day someone threw a boulder through the same bay window that had been the intended target of the Molotov cocktail. "It sounded like a bomb going off," Khaliq recalls. The rock crashed onto a couch in the family room. No one was hurt.

While working in a building on Selby Avenue, Khaliq heard a thud. He didn't know what it was until he found a bullet hole in a steel door-frame, through which he had passed entering the building. A police officer friend of Khaliq's said it appeared he had been deliberately targeted. "He said it looked like a large caliber bullet and that the shooter might have been hiding behind a tree across the street," Khaliq recalls.

At the height of his efforts to clean

up the crack houses along Selby Avenue, Khaliq's three youngest children were horrified one day to find that someone had spray-painted a message on the pavement across an intersection just a block from their house. The message: "Kill Nick Davis." (Nick Davis was Khaliq's name before he adopted his Muslim name in the mid-1990s.)

The family weathered the scares and came out OK, he says, but not without paying a price. "The greatest impact was probably on my kids," Khaliq says.

"At the time I didn't realize that they were going through what they were going through—people calling them names because I was doing what I was doing, saying that I was a sellout, that your dad is going to save the community for the white people and that he is an Uncle Tom. They weren't even free to get on the city bus."

Khaliq regrets that his kids had to deal with that. But what he doesn't regret, despite the price his family paid, is that he never allowed the thugs to run his family out of their neighborhood. "That wasn't an option," Khaliq says.

—KEVIN FEATHERLY

## Around Metro East:

### Boulder marks spot of recent cop killing

BY KEVIN FEATHERLY

Special to Capitol Report

A 30-ton boulder dedicated to Maplewood Police Sgt. Joe Bergeron now stands near the place in St. Paul where the officer was gunned down on May 1.

Officials and police officers from Maplewood, St. Paul and Ramsey County recently gathered at the spot on the Bruce Vento Trail near Lake Phalen, where the killing took place.

Bergeron was shot while responding to a report of a carjacking in Maplewood early on May 1. Police say he stopped two suspects, Jason John Jones and Joshua Michael Martin, both 21 and both of St. Paul. Police say that Jones walked up to Berg-

eron's squad car and shot him as he started exiting his vehicle.

The memorial is a large, pale boulder inscribed with the words, "Sergeant Joseph Bergeron, Maplewood Police Department, gave the ultimate sacrifice on May 1, 2010. With heartfelt gratitude, the community reclaims this earth as sacred ground to honor a peaceful warrior." It also features an engraving of Bergeron's badge.

St. Paul has renamed the section of the trail next to the memorial as the "Joe Bergeron Pass."

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, Maplewood Mayor Will Rossbach, St. Paul Police Chief Tom Smith and Maplewood Police Chief David Thomalla were among the dignitaries who dedicated the memorial to the slain officer during the Nov. 4 ceremony.

"Every organization has its 'rocks'—the people who the others look to for insight, guidance and stability as they pursue the everyday processes that are work and life," Maplewood's Rossbach said at the dedication ceremony. "Sgt. Joseph Bergeron filled this role in Maplewood. I can't think of a more appropri-

ate memorial than the massive stone that will forever remind us of him."

Also in attendance at the ceremony were Bergeron's family, a representative for U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar and St. Paul police officer David Longbehn. Sgt. Bergeron's murderer also attacked Longbehn on May 1, in a separate incident.

Longbehn suffered a severely broken nose and other serious head injuries in a desperate struggle that ended when Longbehn shot and killed his assailant.

Smith says that even before the Bergeron murder, the St. Paul and Maplewood police departments had what he calls "an exceptional relationship."

"We've always had a connection with Maplewood because they are a bordering city," he says. "The real connection is that Joe Bergeron got killed in our city working under the guise of Maplewood."

Smith credits St. Paul police officer Tim Bradley for coming up with the idea of making the boulder a monument to Bergeron. "He was really the driving force," Smith says.

Until the Nov. 4 dedication ceremony, Smith had not returned to the

location where Bergeron was killed. "That's where our command post was and I was there for the entire day until we came to a successful conclusion," he says.

It was tough to go back, he says, as Bergeron's killing "weighs heavily in all of our hearts."

At the dedication ceremony, Maplewood Police Chief Thomalla said that the stone at the trail entrance symbolizes that the city has "reclaimed the land" from the criminals who killed Bergeron.

"We've lost a lot," Thomalla said that day. "The community is reclaiming its land. But this 30-ton rock is just a grain of dust in comparison to the void that is left in the community, in the Bergeron family and the Maplewood Police Department."

"So as the community passes by this rock every day, thank you for taking back this piece of your community. But never forget the void that's left."

The city of St. Paul has posted a 16-minute video of the dedication ceremony. It can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpkdCZ29Wj0>.