Where are the Black business owners?

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter During the early years, Black business was on the rise. You could buy clothes, shoes, car repair and even groceries from a Black owner.

Names like Bill White, Willie Marshall, Don Weston, Charles Perry, Arnold Pinkney, George Forbes all became legends in the Black history of Cleveland business.

Organizations rose to help the average Black business owner, such groups like the Cleveland Business League, a business association for minorities, traces its origins back to the Cleveland Businessmen's Assn., which was founded in 1925 by Herbert Chauncey.

This organization continued until the formation of the Progressive Business Alliance in Feb. 1939. The latter was formed to promote "closer cooperation among a group of the city's business and retail men as well as to stimulate business."

It later expanded to offer a wide variety of services to its members and their families. The alliance sponsored the Negro Business Hour, a Sunday morning radio program, as well as a yearly trade exhibit. The organization also had a Women's Auxiliary.

As the Cleveland Business League, the organization was known as the area's "black chamber of commerce." Its goals were to foster economic development in the African American business community through advocacy, training, and a variety of programs. The league also maintains contact with legislators and offers a health care plan. It has undertaken special projects over the years, such as a contract in 1980 with the City of Cleveland in which the league provided

training and managerial assistance to small and minority business enterprises.

In 1989 the organization was said to be the oldest black trade association in the country. Richard Andrews has served as executive director since 1991. There were approx. 100 members in 1994.

Cleveland Community Savings (formerly the Quincy Savings & Loan Co.) became the 19th largest black-owned savings and loan in the country. In 1954 insurance man Melchisede C. Clarke raised $185,000 from the black community to buy the assets of a Czech savings institution and established Quincy Savings & Loan.

Located at 8309 Quincy Ave., and later at 7609 Euclid Ave., Quincy Savings enabled many blacks to obtain home mortgage financing. Under Clarke's leadership, its assets grew from less than $400,000 to $2 million by 1955, to $8 million by 1969, and to $11 million by 1979, allowing the savings and loan to pay increasing dividends each year.

In 1979 Cleveland businessmen Lawrence Schmelzer and Gerald Gilbert bought controlling interest in Quincy Savings and renamed it Cleveland Community Savings Co. The following year the company moved its headquarters to 4084 Lee Rd. At the end of 1982, Community Savings was burdened with several large delinquent loans, causing its liabilities to exceed its assets and the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corp. took over its operation. The FSLIC closed Cleveland Community Savings permanently in Oct. 1983, citing questionable bookkeeping and irregular loan practices.

Many remember the days of East 105th and Euclid where a man named Winston Willis was popular.

The Black Howard Hughes, Willis was the first African-American to appear in a front page headline story of the city’s largest newspaper, that was not political or crime related.

But his prolific business prowess and radical outspokenness clashed with the city’s politically powerful entities and hierarchical organization and set into motion an enmity that would lead to his eventual economic destruction.

His ongoing legal battles with the city of Cleveland over ownership of his lands spans several decades.

Fleet Slaughter a well know name who owned Lancrs.

A popular nightspot for almost five decades where notables in the black community rallied Cleveland's first black mayor and celebrated the country's first black president -- was destroyed by fire Sunday.

Most churches was famaliar with the Boddie Recording Co. They recorded a wide array of gospel, soul and jazz artists in the 1960s and 1970s when Cleveland had a front row seat to a new musical era.

The State of Black Business in Cleveland shows black businesses continue to struggle for equal footing with “majority owned,” or non-minority businesses, despite improvements in racial relations.

“People have stopped asking why companies are not hiring African-Americans for higher position jobs and using minority-owned businesses.

It seems like Black businesses in the community is a thing of the past. Are Councilmen trying to help Blacks open a new place in their ward? So even though Black Friday was a great day this year, the Black business community is not getting the same love.

Those Black-owned businesses, moreover, earn only 43 cents for every dollar earned by a white-owned firm. They also receive a disproportionately low portion of government-backed business loans.

African-American entrepreneurs face fewer opportunities and more challenges than others do in this country. So until more American companies embrace supplier diversity and make it a practice to buy from Black-owned businesses, African-Americans will continue to face a dim future in the business world.

In the United States, Black-owned businesses are 35 percent more likely to fail than white-owned businesses.