

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Joel I. Ferguson

PERSON

Ferguson, Joel (Joel I.)

Alternative Names: Joel I. Ferguson;

Life Dates: November 14, 1938-

Place of Birth: Lansing, Michigan, USA

Work: Lansing, MI

Occupations: Entrepreneur

Biographical Note

Businessman and developer Joel Ferguson was born on November 14, 1938, in Lansing, Michigan, to Josephine and Rollin Ferguson. He received his bachelor's degree in elementary education in 1965 from Michigan State University, in East Lansing, Michigan.

Ferguson served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1957 to 1959. After college, he taught elementary school and adult education and was assistant director of the job training center for the Michigan Catholic Conference for two years. He served as the director of the Greater Lansing Urban League On the Job Training program from 1967 to 1969. In 1967, he also became the first African American elected to the Lansing City Council, where he served three terms, until 1970. In 1968, he chaired Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in mid-Michigan and the Michigan Delegation to the Democratic National Convention. From 1969 to 1973, Ferguson was development director at the Mid-West Urban Construction Company of Flint, Michigan. In 1972, he worked on George McGovern's presidential campaign and has had a role in every Democratic presidential campaign since. In 1973, Ferguson co-founded F & S Development Company, which became Ferguson Development LLC in 1996, in Lansing. In 1980, Ferguson became co-owner of the property management firm First Housing Corporation and, in 1982, founded WFSL-TV in Lansing, later WSYM Fox47, where he served as president. He co-founded Lansing's Capitol National Bank in 1983. He served as Michigan campaign manager for Reverend Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns. Ferguson founded Lansing's WLAJ-TV, an ABC affiliate, in 1990, where he served as president. Ferguson has developed buildings across Michigan, including for the Michigan State Police and the Michigan House of Representatives.

In 1986, Ferguson was elected to the Michigan State University board of trustees,

where he served twelve years as chair and was the longest-serving member, ending his tenure in 2021. In 1988, Ferguson became an at-large member of the Democratic National Committee, where he later served on the Standing Committee on Credentials. He joined the board of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation in 1989, of which he became vice-chair in 2004, and served on the board of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) from 1995 to 2001. From 2001 to 2003, he was vice-chair of the Democratic National Committee Black Caucus. He also has served on the boards of the Michigan Broadband Development Authority and the Flint Receivership Transition Authority, as a senior advisor for Detroit Mayor Coleman Young's reelection campaign, on the Ingham County Board of Supervisors, the Greater Lansing Safety Council, and the Citizens Commission to Improve Michigan Courts.

Ferguson received the A. Philip Randolph Institute Award in 1987, an NAACP Truth & Justice Award, a Lansing Black Lawyer's Association award in 2005, a doctorate of humane letter from Adrian College in 2008, an award from the Greater Lansing Sports Hall of Fame in 2013, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission Award. In 2022, Ferguson was awarded the Xavier DeGroat Autism Foundation award.

Ferguson and his significant other, Anna Strong, live in Lansing. He has five children, Dori, Barry, Jennifer, David, and Stacie.

Joel Ferguson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 19, 2022.

Related Entries

J.W. Sexton High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Michigan State University [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Michigan Avenue Elementary [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

West Junior High School [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

United States Marine Corps [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1957 to 1959]

Marine

Michigan Catholic Conference [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1965 to 1967]

Teacher, Assistant Director of Job Training Center

Robert F. Kennedy Presidential Campaign [EMPLOYEEOF]

[from 1968 to 1968]

Campaign Manager for Mid-Michigan

F & S Development Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1973 to ?]

Founder

Capitol National Bank [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1983 to 1996]

Co-organizer

WFSL-TV [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1984]

Co-Founder and President

Jesse Jackson Presidential Campaign [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to 1988]

Michigan Campaign Manager

WLAJ-TV [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1990 to ?]

Founder and President

Ferguson Development Company LLC [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1996 to ?]

Founder

Oldsmobile [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1959 to 1965]

Laborer

Mid-West Urban Construction Company [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1969 to 1973]

Development Director

First Housing Corporation [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1980 to ?]

Co-owner

Capitol Bancorp Ltd. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1988 to 2010]

Board

Nevada Bancorp Ltd. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1998 to 2010]

Board

Lansing City Council [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Member

Democratic National Convention [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Delegate

Michigan State University [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member and Chair

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member and Vice Chair

Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Democratic National Committee Black Caucus [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Chair

Michigan Broadband Development Authority [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Flint Receivership Transition Authority Board [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young Reelection Campaign [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Senior Advisor

Greater Lansing Urban League On the Job Training program [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Ingham County Board of Supervisors [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Greater Lansing Safety Council [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Citizens Commission to Improve Michigan Courts [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

Board Member

Country Club of Lansing [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

President

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