

Reggie Bibbs awarded Gold Addy

■ West Orem resident honored for advertising campaign

By KIM HUGHES
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

West Orem resident Reggie Bibbs was wearing a suit and tie when he recently went on stage to receive a Gold Addy Award for his advertising campaign to raise awareness of a disfiguring disorder called neurofibromatosis.

It was a dressy affair at the Hyatt Regency Hotel downtown, which is why Bibbs, 42, wasn't wearing the T-shirt that won him the award.

On the front is an abstract outline of Bibbs' face. On the back are the words "Just Ask."

"I can see how people look at me, and they will just stare," said Bibbs, who was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis as an infant, and has several tumors on his left leg and face.

"You can see they want to ask — but they don't — and it puts both of us in an awkward position. I want them to know it's OK to ask me what's wrong (with me)."

Debbi Ray Walder, chairwoman of the ADDY Awards judging committee, said the category of Public Service, in which Bibbs won, had 65 entries and is "very competitive."

He was selected because the judges thought his ad was "very refreshing."

"The approach of taking someone like Reggie and showing him as a funny, real, sweet spokesperson caught our interest," she said.

Originally from Houston, and still living in the same house in which he grew up, Bibbs said his mother, Dorothy Bibbs, first noticed something was amiss when she would try to put shoes on his feet.

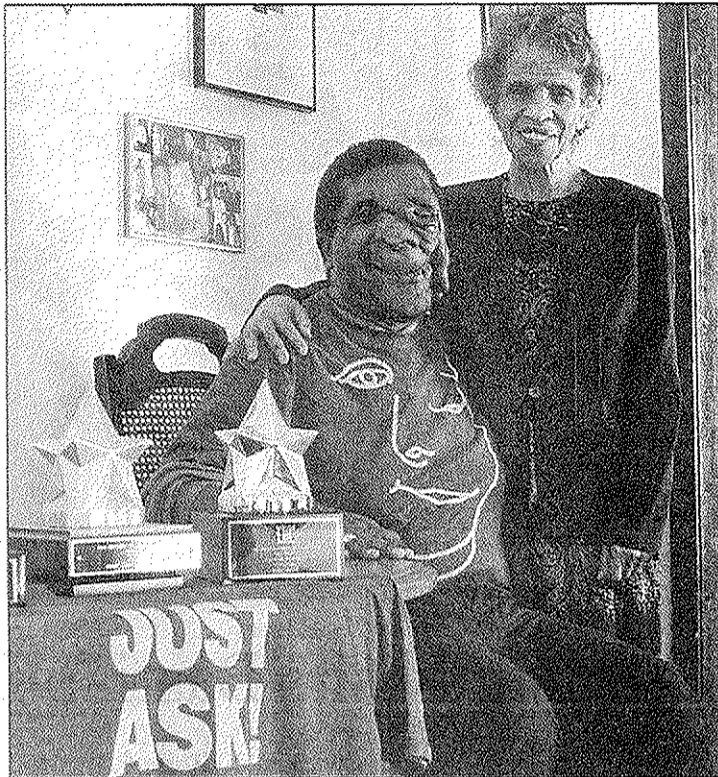
His left shoe just couldn't go over his foot very easily, and he would cry whenever she tried.

Bibbs was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis when he was one.

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, neurofibromatosis affects an estimated 100,000 Americans and occurs in both sexes and all ethnic groups.

It's a genetic disorder of the nervous system that causes tumors to grow, and can produce other skin abnormalities and bone deformities.

"They told her there was no cure for it, and the only thing they could do was follow me," Bibbs said.



R. CLAYTON MCKEE: FOR THE CHRONICLE
JUST ASK: Reggie Bibbs, left, with his mother, Dorothy Bibbs, said he wants people to know "it's OK to ask what's wrong with me." Bibbs, who was born with a disfiguring disorder called neurofibromatosis, recently was honored for his advertising campaign encouraging people to do so.

REGGIE BIBBS

■ Age: 42

■ Community connection: West Orem resident

■ Fast fact: Bibbs recently received a Gold Addy Award for his advertising campaign encouraging people to "Just Ask."

"I know that God has really blessed me in so many ways, that I cannot begin to really express it," Bibbs said.

"He has given me strength just to go on, and I have met so many wonderful people."

That includes Gary Moore, senior associate pastor, Second Baptist Church on Woodway.

"Reggie is so faithful and he's always here," Moore said. "You look out there, and Reggie's just out there smiling."

"Faith points you to a different life, and he is an opportunity for people to show what they're really made of."

But Bibbs said not all people can see past the physical.

"Just recently I was driving along, dropping my nephew off at the bus stop, and I was at a light," Bibbs said. "I happened to glance over to my left, and I see a car full of guys laughing."

"I was just shocked. I don't understand why someone would laugh. I can understand if someone is afraid or curious or something like that. But laugh? I just don't understand that."

He was fitted with special shoes, and Bibbs has since undergone about 10 surgeries to remove tumors from the roof of his mouth, his leg, nose and eye.

Bibbs said surgery is not usually a recommended course of action, because doctors believe removal of existing tumors propagates growth of new tumors.

Growing up, Bibbs said his five brothers and sisters were protective of him, and he knew at a very early age there was something different about him.

"I knew my eyes did not look like my brothers' eyes, I knew I couldn't see very well out of the one eye," Bibbs said.

"Different parts on me were bigger. And as I grew, the tumors grew."

Bibbs recalls the day, when he was about 10, when his brothers were tromping through mud puddles, leaving bare footprints on the sidewalk.

"My footprints, one would be the regular size and the other one would be really big," Bibbs said.

"I would wish I could make the same kinds of footprints everyone else was making."

Bibbs learned to accept and love himself, with the help of his mother, siblings and neighbors.

"We did a lot of praying and trying to encourage Reggie to just not worry about it," said Dorothy Bibbs, 70.

He also credits his faith for getting him through hard times.



PHOTOS: FOR THE CHRONICLE
as named Mardi Gras king at

at the good times roll

THE East End Chamber of Commerce celebrated Fat Tuesday with a Mardi Gras party at Heuser Busch Brewery, 775 Bluhorn. The event included crowning the Mardi Gras king and queen.

dren, Barbosa

nder of Challenge Office ducts.
He thought it important to h out to children.
He believed in supporting people who will make this ld a better place for us all," bosa said.

C'mon. get a great rate.