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Work of former community advocate comes full circle

MOBILE – For the family of William Porter, the saying “what goes around, comes around” has proven to be remarkably true.

Porter, who died a little more than 12 years ago, was a fixture in the Mobile community. A leading advocate for people with disabilities, he was the south Alabama area supervisor in the Mobile office of what is now the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS).

He was known as “Mr. Rehabilitation” because he was active in several Mobile-area disability organizations and on the board of many of them.

Now his great grandson, Cooper West, is reaping the awards of Porter’s diligence, commitment and hard work for people with disabilities.

The youngster, who was born premature, is receiving services through Alabama’s Early Intervention System, the division of ADRS that serves infants and toddlers from birth to 3.

Though he is 13 months old, Cooper is unable to walk or crawl. He has been diagnosed with hydrocephalus, a condition that causes the abnormal accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles, or cavities, of the brain.

Following the diagnosis, Cooper’s mother, Ashley Porter, called her grandfather’s former secretary about getting assistance for her son. She was referred to Early Intervention, which is coordinating services for the toddler through Goodwill Easter Seals in Baldwin County. Cooper is currently receiving physical therapy to help him learn to walk, but as he ages, he may receive assistance as necessary through the department’s continuum of services, which serves Alabamians from birth to old age with disabilities.

His great grandfather’s efforts helped to make some of those services possible for him. Porter was past president of the Alabama Rehabilitation Association and on the board of directors of several rehabilitation organizations, including Goodwill Industries of Mobile and the Mobile Association for the Blind.

He helped secure federal funds for the building of Goodwill Industries in Mobile and the Mobile Association for the Blind. He also assisted in obtaining funds for the construction of the ADRS facility on Gordon Smith Drive. A conference room in the building is named in honor of Porter, who worked for the department for 32 years.

Ashley said it is wonderful to know that the work of one family member paved the way for another.

“It means a lot to me,” she said, tearfully. “I’m impressed with everyone from Rehab Services who has been there for us. It’s really been a blessing. I know my grandfather would be very proud.”

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services is the state agency whose mission is to enable Alabama’s children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.