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MARION STATION -- As Honiss Cane Jr. eased into a seventh term on the Pocomoke City Town Council, his younger brother, Rudy, squeaked through a tense race to lead the black agenda in the Maryland General Assembly.

Unlike his brother, Honiss was a shoe-in for the District 2 seat in town government. He'd faced no challengers since his first municipal election 18 years ago. So on April 6, there was no need for voting polls in Pocomoke to open. "We've developed the best city family in the United States and built on fairness," Honiss Cane said.

Rudy, though, nailed the chairmanship of the Legislative Black Caucus that same week with merely three votes, and for the first time in the history of the caucus, shifted leadership to the Eastern Shore from Baltimore and Prince George's counties.

"I campaigned hard, won by only one vote," said Rudy Cane, who represents parts of Dorchester and Wicomico counties. "I was very pleased. I promised I'd be fair and work to be best of my ability to keep us up in the 21st Century."

Election events were marked by stark contrasts, yet served as celebrated reminders -- and almost simultaneous -- of 60 years of Canes' influence in local, regional and state politics.

The brothers, both Democrats, were among six siblings raised in Marion Station on the southern end of Somerset County, sons of H. Webster Cane Sr., a Republican whose political involvement and business assume was a way of life.

Their father was the first in the family to seek a seat in the Maryland House of Delegates back in 1944, when Honiss and Rudy were respectively, 14 and 11 years old, and the family business, the Golden Slipper in rural Marion Station, was a night club that doubled as a meeting place for blacks with civic and political agendas.

Ever since, Democrat or Republican, the Canes have been a reckoning, political force on the Lower Shore.

"We were a close family. Leadership ability was in the family, in the blood. Period," Honiss Cane said.

Rudy Cane, 69, and a practical newcomer to the General Assembly, dismisses the notion his victory is a sign of a weakening of power in the General Assembly for movers and shakers on the western shore.

Rather, his win over Baltimore Del. Clarence Davis, a 20-year veteran in the House of Delegates, reflects the presence of blacks from the Eastern Shore in Annapolis, Cane said. Until his win in the House in 1998, no blacks from the Eastern Shore had served in the General Assembly.

"Until I was elected, no blacks had ever been elected to Annapolis. Therefore, no one on the Eastern Shore was in a position to be a member of the Black Caucus," said Cane, who begins a two-year term in June as president of the 43-member caucus.

"The goal of the caucus is to make sure blacks in the legislature are recognized so that we may improve the lifestyles of blacks in the state. My intent is to see that blacks in the whole state are represented."

Rudy Cane, a retired biologist and administrator for the State Highway Administration's Eastern Regional Laboratory, was living in Wicomico County and in 1990 started a political career as a member of Wicomico County Council. He entered politics "to make a difference."

"My father liked politics and just got involved locally because I saw that things were not right," he said. "My father was in politics, ran for the House of Delegates. They said he won, but he lost because, people said, (his opponent) was buying votes."

Like his father, Rudy Cane lost his first bid for the state House. But after a defeat in 1994, he went on to win by 63 percent of the vote in both 1998 and 2000.

"It has been a wonderful experience. It is worthwhile having the experience and creating a fever. I'd like to continue," said Rudy Cane, who lives in Hebron with his wife, Louella.

His 72-year-old brother, Honiss, joined the Pocomoke Town Council in 1986 in the race that gave the city its first black representative. A decade later, he was part of a lawsuit that won minority-district representation in Worcester County government, and is credited with pushing for a redistricting measure that evened the playing field and helped elect the first black county commissioner.

"(The issue) was not altogether racial, but a pull for political power," said Honiss Cane, who was unsuccessful at his own attempt to win a seat on the county board. "Cane v. Worcester County made me a bad guy. But we redrew the lines."

As the senior member of the Pocomoke Town Council, Honiss Cane last week was named first vice president, a position in "fairness," he says. He is considering retirement from politics.

"I'm looking for somebody to replace me," said Honiss Cane, who lives in Pocomoke City with his wife, Miriam.

Not his brother. The caucus pushed for and won guarantees that at least 25 percent of state contracts are awarded to minority business enterprises, and Rudy Cane is pushing for state contracts to minority engineers, architects and other skilled professionals. "Now, contracts are awarded to truckers. Minorities get money, but not the prestigious positions. I'd like to see minority civil engineers," he said.

"This year, an aspiring minority is expected to get a cabinet position. The caucus has been working on it," Rudy Cane said. "I'd like to keep going, and serve at least 12 years."

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