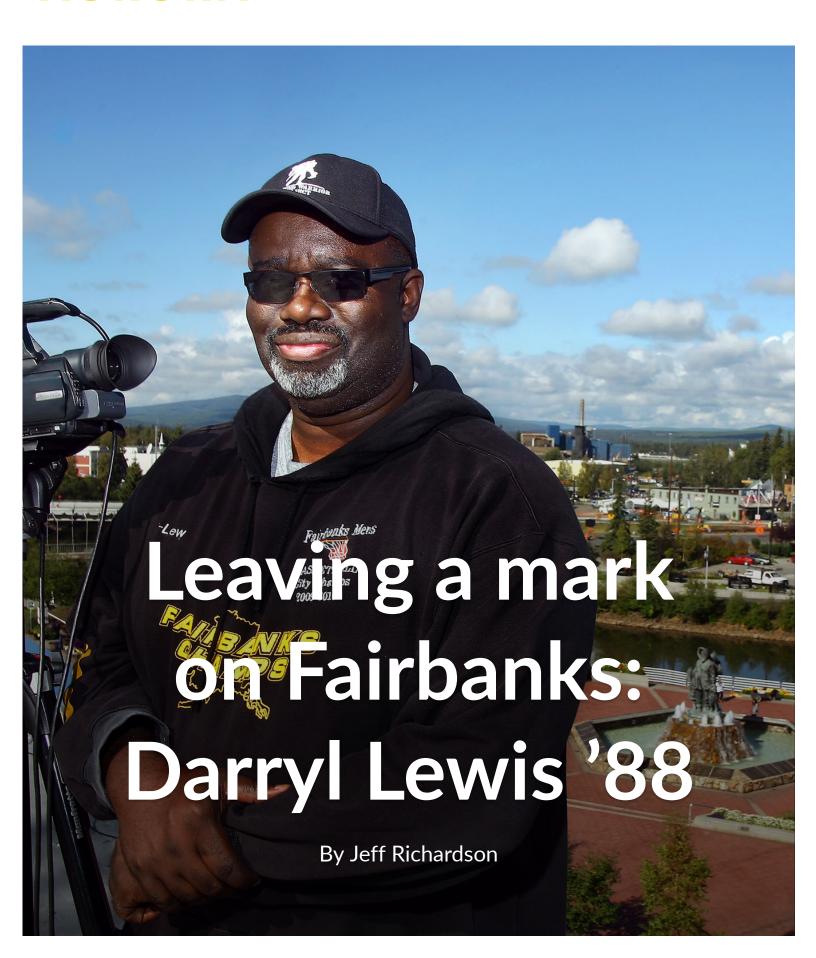
AURORA



Above: Darryl Lewis Sr. surveys downtown Fairbanks from a rooftop in 2013. The longtime reporter and Alaska Nanooks basketball player moved from his adopted hometown soon afterward for a new life in Denver. Photo courtesy of Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

During an otherwise routine work shift at Sterling Correctional Center, Darryl Lewis Sr. suddenly found himself in the middle of an unexpected celebrity sighting.

While working as an officer at the Colorado prison facility, Lewis was approached by an inmate who politely said he looked familiar. Kind of like a guy who did television news in Fairbanks, Alaska, where he used to live. After some cautious back and forth, Lewis '88 confirmed that he had, indeed, worked for many years as an anchor and reporter for KTVF, the NBC affiliate in Fairbanks.



Photo caption: A promotional shot shows Darryl Lewis Sr. during his days as a Fairbanks television news anchor and reporter. Photo courtesy of KTVF Channel 11.

The news sent the man into hysterics — he'd met a real-life star.

"He was telling everyone, 'That dude is famous, he's famous! Darryl Lewis, Newscenter 11!'" Lewis said with a chuckle. "He was going out of his mind, out of his mind."

It's been nearly seven years since Lewis moved away from Fairbanks for a new life in Denver, but moments like that underscore the lasting impact he made on his adopted hometown.

With a commanding 6-foot-4-inch frame and a deep, powerful voice, Lewis is hard to miss. He spent nearly three decades establishing a big presence in the Golden Heart City, first as an Alaska Nanooks basketball player and later as a high-profile newsman.

"To this day, I think, he's one of the best-known people in Fairbanks," said Brian O'Donoghue, a retired University of Alaska Fairbanks journalism professor and longtime friend. "The big man makes a big impression."

'We're going to take care of you'

It's a bit ironic, because young Darryl Lewis couldn't have been a more reluctant Fairbanksan.

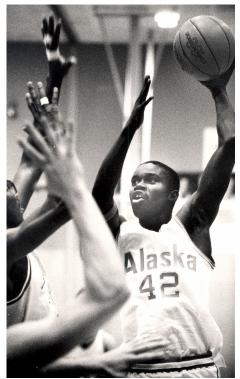
The Columbus, Ohio, native was playing hoops for a junior college in California in the mid-'80s when he got an offer to continue his basketball career at UAF. Lewis was one of six kids raised by a single mom, and he figured the full-ride scholarship was the only way he'd be able to afford a college education.

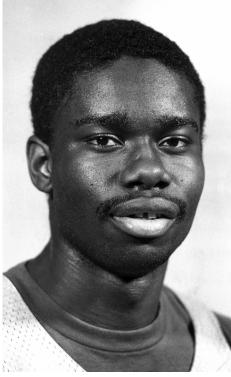
But almost as soon as he agreed to head north, Lewis began looking for a way out. He'd never been to Alaska, and the thought of heading to a small, frozen outpost gave him cold feet.

He called Nanooks men's basketball coach George Roderick to say he'd reconsidered, spent a few weeks working at a Burger King in California, then reconsidered again. On the way to Alaska, he changed his mind a third time. He called his mother from the Seattle airport to say he was coming home. After Mom cussed him out, Lewis hung his head and got on the plane.

Lewis arrived in Fairbanks a week late for school in September 1985, crying during the drive to his dorm room at Lathrop Hall. When he met his teammates, Lewis discovered he was the only Black player on the team.







Clockwise starting from top: Darryl Lewis Sr. sits with the Nanooks men's basketball team in 1985-1986, his first year on the squad (Courtesy of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Department of Athletics). Lewis poses for a newspaper picture during his days with the Nanooks (Courtesy of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner). Lewis takes a shot during a game against American International College in 1986 (Courtesy of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner).

But amid that culture shock, Lewis recalled Roderick's nononsense recruiting pitch. "I'm going to be straight — it gets cold up in Fairbanks," he'd said. "But we're going to take care of you."

They did, helping Lewis ease in after that rough introduction. Lewis said he began to feel comfortable after his first summer job in Fairbanks, when the big-city kid from Ohio worked with UAF's Upward Bound program. He helped Alaska Native students make the transition from village life to the metropolis of Fairbanks. Their surprising

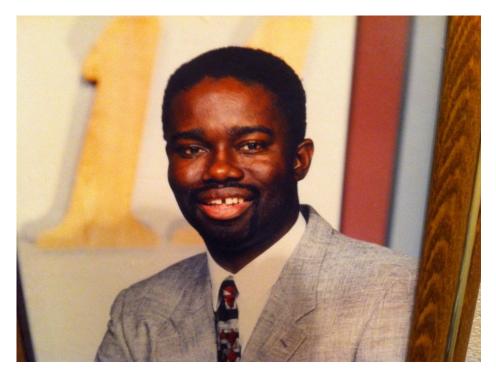
bonds over UAF culture shock led to some lifelong friends and a new sense of purpose.

Three years later, Lewis was a new graduate with a degree in broadcast journalism.

"It's still one of the greatest achievements in my life to be the first in my family to graduate from college," Lewis said. "And I'm eternally grateful that my mom didn't have to pay one dime, because she didn't have it."

Making a career covering Fairbanks

Lewis didn't immediately break into local journalism, instead taking jobs in the mental health field working with at-risk youth. He got his first chance at a TV role in 1996, landing a temp job to fill in while KTVF anchor **Carla Browning '93** was on maternity leave.



Darryl Lewis Sr. sits on the broadcast set during his days as a Fairbanks television news anchor and reporter. Photo courtesy of KTVF Channel 11.

Lewis kept his graveyard shift at Fairbanks Community
Health Center, but he never left KTVF. For the next 17
years, he was seemingly everywhere in Fairbanks, lugging
a camera to accident scenes, covering hundreds of court
proceedings and offering a colorful delivery to the nightly
sportscast.

"I knew everybody in Fairbanks — white, Black or Native," he said. "And if people know they can trust you, they'll talk to you."



The Lewis family on a 2010 vacation in Hawaii. From left, daughter Jessie, daughter Dana Jean, wife Lisa '98, Darryl Sr. '88, daughter Lucy '06, '08, son Darryl Jr. and daughter Lila. Photo courtesy of Darryl Lewis Sr.

After years of working two jobs, Lewis decided in 2013 that it was time to take a break. His wife, **Lisa Lewis '98**, wanted to be closer to her daughter, **Lucy '06, '08**, and their young grandchildren, so they moved to Denver and a new life.

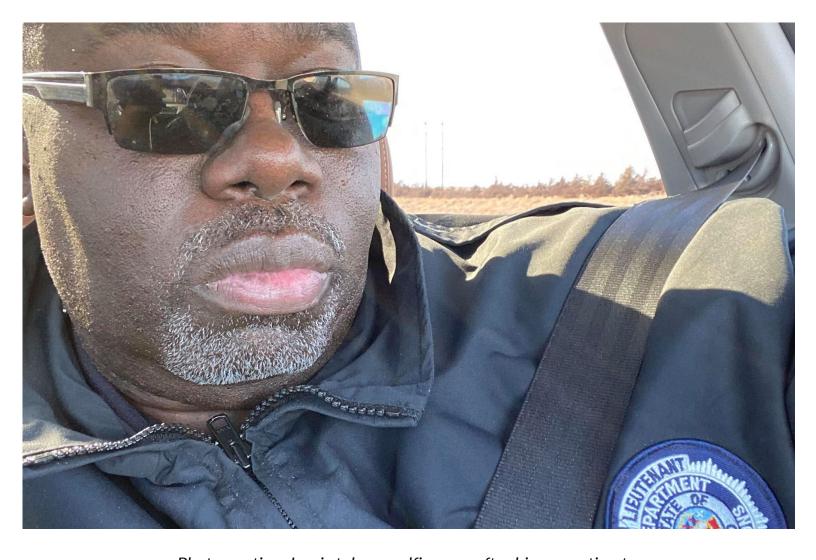


Photo caption: Lewis takes a selfie soon after his promotion to lieutenant with the Colorado Department of Corrections.

Photo by Darryl Lewis Sr.

It didn't take long for Lewis to realize that sitting around wasn't for him, leading to a surprising career shift as a corrections officer. Lewis said his path was greatly influenced by the legacy of his good friends Scott Johnson and Gabe Rich, two Alaska State Troopers who were killed in the line of duty in 2014.

"I wanted to make a difference and do my part," he said.

"You try to hold people accountable, you try to treat
people the way you want to be treated."

Lewis was promoted to lieutenant nearly a year ago, and he now serves as a shift commander at a corrections complex in Denver.

Years later, Alaska ties remain strong

O'Donoghue, who first met Lewis as a reporter, said he's not surprised that Lewis was able to easily adapt to the world of criminal justice.

"I think he'd tell you it's ironic with all the crime stories he pursued that he'd end up where he is now, but he's not someone who would shy away from that," he said. "It's a one-on-one thing, but I think he can talk to just about anyone."

O'Donoghue said that ability to make easy connections was clear the last time he saw Lewis. He was part of the group aboard the UAF float in the Golden Days Parade in 2018, drawing a rock star's greeting as the processional slowly moved down First Avenue.



Darryl Lewis Sr. joins students, alumni, staff, faculty and administration during the 2019 Golden Days Parade in Fairbanks. UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

Many of Lewis' ties to Alaska still play a big role in his life. Four of Lewis' five children remain in the state, from Fairbanks to Ketchikan, and his visits back north are a busy processional of friends and relatives.

Looking back, Lewis said that brutal phone call with his mother in the Seattle airport was one of the most important moments of his life.

"I'm eternally grateful that I chose to stick it out," he said.

"The University of Alaska Fairbanks gave this poor kid

from Columbus, Ohio, a chance to be better."



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUnCSYNGPpo

Video caption: A collection of footage of Darryl Lewis Sr. during his time as television news anchor and reporter. Courtesy of Darryl Lewis and KTVF Channel 11.

