

Amos Otis, who built SoBran Inc. into one of the top 100 companies on the Black Enterprise list of major black-owned businesses.

From humble roots in Alabama

# Amos Otis

Went on to Build a Company in the Black Enterprise Top 100

By Randy L. Barber

**G**rowing up of humble means in the public housing of Montgomery, Alabama, during the early 1950s, Amos Otis and his childhood friends would gather outside their local church and listen to the sermons and speeches of civil rights movement pioneers Martin Luther King, Jr. and E.D. Nixon, as well as other leaders. They also experienced the Montgomery Bus Boycott first-hand as they came into frequent contact with fellow public housing resident Rosa Parks. At that time, they didn't realize these early influences would later play a key role in their development.

As these historical moments in America's history flashed before his very eyes, Brother Otis never envisioned that he would one day be the president and chief executive of his own company, one that would be part of the Black Enterprise top 100.

Although education, excellence, and self-improvement were always stressed by his mother and other family members, Otis never actively looked to become a leader. Yet, he found that this ability came naturally and was recognized early on by his high school classmates, community leaders, and later by his military peers.

Adhering to the lessons learned during his childhood as well as the Air Force values of integrity, service and excellence, Otis founded SoBran

Inc. in 1987, after a distinguished 21-year career as an Air Force officer. He has led his company and spearheaded growth from a small start-up in the basement of his Fairfax County, Virginia home, to a \$63 million technical and professional services enterprise headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, with a staff of more than 900 employees in nine states and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

## Uncompromised Quality and Service

SoBran provides services and expertise for bio-medical research, mail security, risk management, engineering and logistics programs to government and commercial clients.

"Our professional services help clients to be both effective and safe, enabling them to meet their goals and respond to new opportunities," Otis said. "Whether we are supporting scientists developing vaccines, managing logistics operations or protecting employees through our SafeMail program, our clients receive uncompromised quality and service."

Under Otis' leadership, SoBran has enjoyed an impressive 27-year track record serving higher education, corporate and government clients such as the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Homeland Security and all branches of the



Department of Defense.

The company has reached Inc. magazine's list of America's fastest-growing private companies and Black Enterprise magazine's list of the Top 100 Minority-Owned Businesses for several years running. It has earned the highly prestigious U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Small Business Achievement Award. Otis himself has been profiled in Black Enterprise as an innovator in workforce readiness.

In January of 2012, Otis was appointed to the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland's Cincinnati branch.

### Known for Leadership Skills

As a teenager, Otis lived near Alabama State Teacher's College. It was there he and a group of fellow Montgomery students, the "Bama Menz," learned the benefits of furthering their education. Most of the group, including Otis, was also positively influenced by Kappa men they had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with.

Upon enrolling at Tennessee State, it was obvious to Otis, that the Kappas there were both high achievers and also the popular social leaders on campus. Otis was eventually initiated into the fraternity at the Alpha Theta Chapter at Tennessee State in 1961. While an undergraduate, he served as polemarch and was known for his leadership skills.

He also helped recruit childhood friend and fellow "Bama Man" Bob Williams, who was later initiated into the fraternity at Alpha Theta. Otis would later go on to recruit Williams once again, this time, as vice president of corporate services for SoBran, a position he still holds today.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree from Tennessee State in 1965, Otis earned an MBA from California State University at Fullerton and a Master of Military Arts and Science degree from the Air University. He now lives in Northern Virginia with his wife, Brenda Wills Otis, where he is a member of the Alexandria-Fairfax Alumni Chapter.

### Supporter of Numerous Causes

Otis supports numerous national organizations and causes ranging from the American Heart Association, the United Negro College Fund, the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Smile Train, Doctors Without Borders and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African-American History and Culture. He also supports Linda Vista Inc., a residential and rehabilitative home for single mothers and their children.

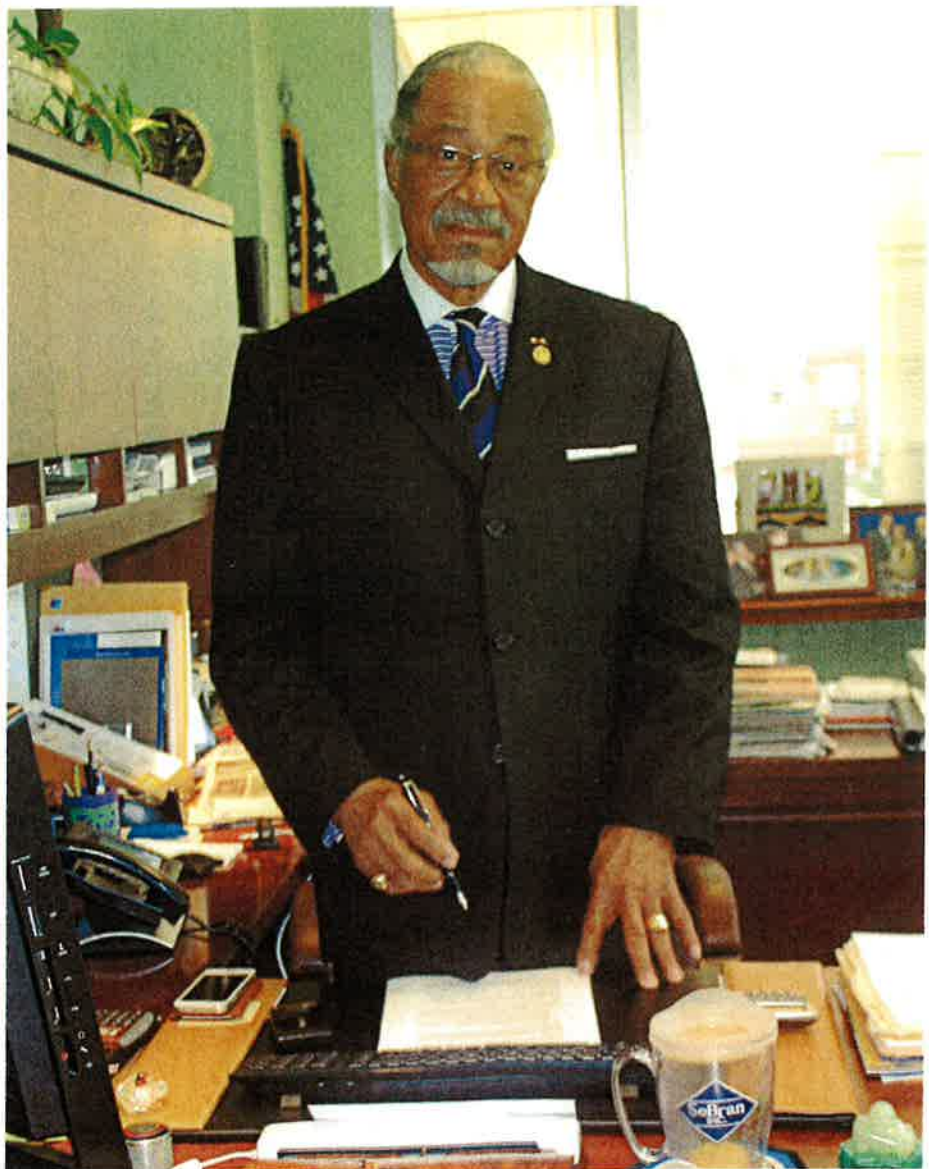
Otis contends that one of his main passions is improving educational opportunities for deserving youths. He has had a longstanding commitment to support historically black colleges and universities.

He is treasurer of the Tennessee State University Education Foundation Board and also chairs its finance committee. In

addition, Otis formerly chaired the Beta Nu Boule' Education Foundation of the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity. He has established a number of scholarships and endowments. These include the SoBran/Scoman Educational Scholarship Endowment at Tennessee State University at Nashville.

In the town of his childhood, he established the Brenda Faye Otis-Lee Educational Scholarship (in his sister's memory) at the St. Jude Educational Institute. Otis also supports the Resurrection Catholic Mission, which serves economically disadvantaged minority children.

His main message to aspiring entrepreneurs is to carefully formulate a detailed plan to succeed. "Business is a science," Otis said. "Get an idea, make it a goal, create a professional business plan, and implement your plan. Inspiration, dedication, discipline and perseverance breed excellence."



Photos by Justin Miles