

BOOKS

Local author takes home 'historic' awards

BY AMY FOWLER

Associate Editor

More than half a century ago, Heman Sweatt made history by becoming the first African American to attend the University of Texas Law School. The lawsuit he filed in order to make that feat possible was eventually overshadowed by Brown v. Board of Education, the case that ended segregation in America.

Cedar Park author Gary Lavergne, the director of admissions research and policy analysis at UT, argues the Sweatt case would have eventually ended segregation had Brown never come along. His book, "Before Brown," was published last year and is receiving high honors from his colleagues.

"It was a beautifully crafted account of a case that set extremely important precedent," said Rico Ainslie, Carr P. Collins Award committee chair for the Texas Institute of Letters. "The research and craftsmanship and the writing was quite exceptional."

Lavergne accepted the Collins Award at the TIL banquet April 30. In March, he accepted the Coral Horton Tullis Memorial Prize for

the best book on Texas History at the annual meeting of the Texas State Historical Association. Together, the two prizes earned Lavergne \$5,000.

"The two big non-fiction prizes for books by Texans or about Texas I won this year," Lavergne said. "It was exciting."

He said he was honored and surprised to have earned even one of the awards, let alone both of them.

"The competition in both categories was really very, very tough," he said. "In both cases these are judges that are essentially my peers. In some ways, it's kind of like the Academy Awards because your peers vote on that. So it was very flattering to me to get that."

Kent Calder, executive director of the Historical Association, said the committee judging the Tullis Prize was looking for good scholarship and subject matter that was significant. He said the competition is always stiff, and he was happy for Lavergne.

"I've met him before and I've known him in Austin," he said. "I'm just really glad that he got the award and I think it's a good representation of the kind of work we're look-



Gary Lavergne in his home office in Cedar Park. Lavergne earned two prestigious awards for his book about Hermann Sweatt. ARCHIVE PHOTO

ing for."

Lavergne said his prize money will go toward recouping expenses he incurred while writing the book.

"Basically, I have to refurbish my coffers," he said.

And he's going to take a little time to revel before starting on his next project.

"I haven't the slightest clue of what my next book is going to be," he said. "The good news is, I don't have to write a book if I don't want to. So, I'm going to take my time and enjoy the success of this one."

For more information on "Before Brown" or Lavergne, visit www.garylavergne.com.