

Black students gather in Round Lake Beach for first leadership summit

The Focus was Entrepreneurship, Leadership and Community Engagement

United States -- Free-Press-Release.com -- Apr 29, 2019 -- Community leaders gathered about 100 young men from eight Lake County high schools to come together to learn from local leaders and share with their peers during the first African American Male Leadership Summit at the Round Lake Beach Cultural & Civic Center on Thursday, April 25, 2019.

Organizers, which include leaders in Business, Education and Law Enforcement, said they hope the event is the first of many focusing on black students. The Planning Committee included Michael Darling, Marvin Bembry, Heather Bennett, Michael Berrie, Delante Greer, William King, Malcolm Newsome, Gilbert Rivera, Dr. Kurt Rohlwing and Harold Rollins.

Michael Berrie, the principal of Round Lake High School, indicated that black students make up less than 10 percent of the student populations at each of the eight high schools in the Northern Lake County Conference.

The students spent most of the morning in small groups discussing the three themes of the event: leadership, entrepreneurship and community. This was followed up with networking and lunch.

Marc Jones, in 2015 became just the second black man to be elected to the Waukegan Park District board, asked the young men who attended his session on leadership to share with him who in their lives they looked up to. Most of the students cited family members who had earned a college degree or had been successful in their careers.

Jones said one thing that all of those people had in common was they made the choice to keep striving, despite the obstacles that were put before them just because they were black.

"You have a choice when things happen in life to let them overtake you," Jones said. "Or you can be the one inspiring younger family members by your example."

The keynote speaker was Lake County Circuit Court Judge George Bridges. Bridges, the first black man to hold that position, also served as Waukegan police chief.

Judge Bridges stressed the importance of leadership and character in his speech. He told the story of Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who read his own obituary when a local newspaper mistakenly thought he'd died. Bridges said the article, which focused on the thousands of people who perished because of Nobel's invention, made Nobel reconsider his legacy and ultimately inspired him to start giving out the prestigious prize that still bears his name.

"You have the ability just as Alfred Nobel did to impact and change your legacy," Bridges told the assembled students. "What do you want written about you?"

Michael Darling, an insurance agency owner in Mundelein, lead the entrepreneur session. He wanted each young man to know that each of them are entrepreneurs and we are available to assist them in their journey to business ownership. Other entrepreneur co-facilitators were Sedrik Newbern, Marques Rice, Ronald Finch, and Cory Ratliff.

Marvin Bemby, a leadership coach, mentor and speaker who was one of the main event organizers along with Round Lake Beach Police Chief Gilbert Rivera, said there were several great reasons to learn how to tie a necktie, including that they could wear it to job interviews or in their careers.

"Ties signify that you are going the extra mile deliberately and intentionally," Bemby said.

Heather Bennett, a spokeswoman for Round Lake Area Unit School District 116 and one of the event organizers, said they hope to convene the same students again and have African American Male Leadership Summits twice a year.

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