



PHOTOS BY DUSTIN HOLT

The 100 Men of Distinction honored by FireFlies Denton included James Bell Jr. of Easton, Derick Daly of Easton, Joseph Ferguson Sr. of Easton, James Gardner Jr. of Easton, Lonnell Green of Easton, Robert Guy of Cordova, Shelton Hawkins of Easton, Dionte Hynson of Easton, Kirk Hynson of Cordova, Arthur Jackson Jr. of Easton, Dwayne Lovett of Easton, Dondre Phoenix of Easton, Richard Potter Jr. of Easton, Tremaine Thomas of Easton and Richie White of Easton.

# 100 Men of Distinction

**FireFlies Denton youth organization honors 100 Shore African-American men for community contributions**

By **DUSTIN HOLT**  
 dholt@chespub.com

**RIDGELY** — Passion and celebration filled the North Carolina High School auditorium Saturday, March 5, as the FireFlies Denton youth organization celebrated 100 Men of Distinction on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

The Caroline County organization honored 100 African-American men from Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Wicomico, Worcester and Somerset counties for their contributions to the community. Of the 100 men, 65 were able to make it to the ceremony, which featured singing and dance performances, along with spiritual presentations from all ages of the community.

"Our mission is to be a catalyst to unify community groups to create opportunities for youth and young adults," said FireFlies Denton President Doncella Wilson. "These great men represent so many great things in our communities. They work with youth and are great role models. We are (incredibly) blessed to have such a fantastic group leading our communities."

The message centered around continuing to be a strong voice and leading the way for a better life in the future.

Paul Tue III of Chestertown was one of the 100 Men of Distinction and spoke about the climate facing African-American youth in 2016. Tue is co-founder and vice president of the Bayside HOYAS (Helping Our Youth Achieve Success), a youth program that targets young men from the ages of 11 to 17. The program performs various activities, including community cleanup projects, book clubs, study halls and basketball. He also is a Pop Warner Football coach and Kent County Parks and Recreation basketball coach.

"I would like to thank the FireFlies of Denton for putting on such an auspicious occasion," he said. "To understand the current climate of black America today, we must compare the conditions to our past. This helps foster a dialogue on how we can begin to navigate continued adversity. America is not yet done with the illness of racism. The whole issue of racism had a more straightforward approach in the past. It used to be something loud and terrible about racism."

"Today, we have hints, suggestions and indications of racial bias all around us," Tue said. "It is typically unspoken, if not all together invisible. While it is not visible, there is often a plausible cover story that can be told as to why racially differential treatment was somehow justifiable and legitimate."

"African-American communities of color, face many ugly obstacles," he said. "The killing of Michael Brown by a white police officer, in which a grand jury decided there was not enough probable cause to indict the officer, was not the first time that an unarmed black man got killed by

a white officer. As the case showed with Eric Garner and Freddie Gray showed, it won't be the last."

"Pro-black is not anti-white," he said. "Wanting more for your life, and more for your people is not being a racist. It is being aware."

Tue said the community cannot waste any more time.

"What will you do with your 24 hours today?" he said. "In America today, I see a generation of young people who society calls the lost generation. The previous generation seems too scared to connect with our youth. They don't take the time to really get to know them. They won't listen to their music. They won't hear their issues, embrace their technology."

"But if we continue to ignore them, our future surely will be lost," he said. "I implore you to meet these so-called lost youth where they are, regardless of the way they dress, regardless of the music they listen to or the language they may be using. I dare you to engage, interact with them. Listen to them. I'm a firm believer if you take the time to invest in our youth in a sincere way, you can get through to them."

Tue said adults must relate to and respect today's youth. He said though the generations may differ on their points of view, the goals are often the same.

"I once was a knucklehead," he said. "And I thought I knew it all. I was cocky, arrogant and brash. But my mentor, he saw me throughout all the pitfalls of my youth. He loved me unconditionally."

"Remember, you have not always had that degree," Tue said. "You have not always had your stuff together. Reach back, and grab and invest in time of these youngsters before it is too late."

Tue told the youth to be proud of accomplishments and avoid stereotypes.

"You are not a thug. You are not a gangster," he said. "You are standing on the shoulders of great men and women — kings and queens, doctors, lawyers, inventors, entrepreneurs, businessmen and businesswomen. It is time, and long overdue, we start conducting ourselves according."

"The men and women, who put this program together, they are telling you that you are worth something. You are gifted and you are smart. You want to be taken seriously, pull up your pants or put on a belt."

Tue said racism remains a force in American life, but there has been much progress, which should be celebrated.

"But just because we don't face the racism of the past, doesn't mean we fix the problems of today," he said. "Black progress hinges on the leadership of young people, and a new generation of concerned, connected individuals, unafraid to speak, unafraid to be heard."

"Generations before paved the path to able people of color to obtain a high education and access better jobs," Tue said. "It is time for this new generation to demand progress for the next to come. So again, I ask you all, what would you do with your 24 hours today?"

During the event, the crowd was brought to their feet by performances by the Russ Ice Band, Armah Dashiell of Cambridge, the Morgan State University Alpha Omega Nu Christian Fraternity Steppers and a solo by North Carolina High School student Darrien Brown.

The Rev. Cordell E. Hunter Sr. spoke about unfinished business.



Denton Elementary School student Ivory Clanton rounded out the speeches at the 100 Men of Distinction ceremony on Saturday, March 5.

"All you have to do is look on the stage here and see the majesty of God," he said. "I just want to you understand there is still unfinished work to do. We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go."

"I'm so glad I see all the men in the house," Hunter said. "God has given you the responsibility, the position and the appointing that you are royal people. The charge is given to you. The commission is given to you. The empowerment is given to you by God."

Hunter said while youth need a great adult support system, the children also need to take responsibility of their success.

"Number one, we got to stay in school," he said. "My young folk, do not become a victim of self-inflicted wounds — stay in school. Stay in school because when you drop out of the school line, you drop in to the prison line. And building prisons is the biggest industry in America."

"Stay off them drugs," he said. "You want to get a high. It is not shooting a spike. It is not shoving it up your nose. It is not being a crackhead. Call on the name of Jesus. He will take you higher."

"Start understanding yourself, who you are and where you came from," Hunter said. "The charges to all of the men in the house, you can do better. All you got to do is call on the name of the Lord. He'll take you higher. There is victory in Christ Jesus. Do the will of the Lord."

Denton Elementary School student Ivory Clanton rounded out the speeches before awards were presented.

"I think that we are all the same, and what Martin Luther King did for us is special," Clanton said. "He reminded us that we are all people. It doesn't matter what color we are."

"There is still some racism in the world and we need to stop it," he said. "We thank God for what He has done for us. He brought Martin Luther King to save us, but we need to take a step further, and we need to recognize that we are all the same."

"We might be a different color, but if we feel each other's skin, we are all going to feel the same," Clanton said. "Our blood is going to be the same. That is why we have these groups of people that still speak for the people that are too shy, that can't come up and speak for themselves. That is why we come here and we speak."

For more information about the FireFlies Denton youth organization, visit the organization's page on Facebook.

Follow Caroline/Dorchester Editor Dustin Holt on Twitter @Dustin\_StarDem.

## The 100 Men of Distinction

### Caroline County

Clint Bordley Jr. of Federalsburg, Fred Brummell Sr. of Denton, Kevin Brummell of Denton, Jason Edwards of Ridgely, Cory Ellis of Federalsburg, Romont Fletcher of Denton, Francis Gates of Denton, Minister Craig Gibson of Ridgely, Teran Goldsborough of Denton, Wallace Gould Jr. of Greensboro, Terrelle Hall of Denton, Shane Hynson of Henderson, Elonzia Knight of Denton, Berl Lovelace of Ridgely, Danny Molock Jr. of Denton, Rodney Neal, Samuel Nichols Jr. of Preston, Damien Ransome of Denton, David Ricks Sr. of Federalsburg, Sherwood Sharp Sr. of Preston, Kevin Smith, Dwain Thomas, Robert Thomas Sr. of Denton, Romelo Thomas and Vernon Wilson of Ridgely

### Dorchester County

Devon Beck of Cambridge, Bishop Charles Cephas of Hurlock, Armah Dashiell of Cambridge, Herbert Dennis Sr. of Hurlock, Herbert Dennis Jr. of Hurlock, Melvin Jews of Cambridge, Wayne Outlaw of Hurlock, Antione Patton Sr. of Cambridge and Kevin Washington of Cambridge

### Queen Anne's County

James Bower of Grasonville, Derrick Burke, Queen Anne's County Warden Lamonte Cooke, Damonte Dodd of Centreville, Lawrence Dunn Jr., Gary Emory Sr. of Centreville, Clarence Graham, L.C. Lawrence of Centreville, Trevor Nichols, Walter Paul III of Centreville, Wilford Tingle of Grason-

ville, Clayton Washington and George Wright of Chester

### Talbot County

James Bell Jr. of Easton, Derick Daly of Easton, Joseph Ferguson Sr. of Easton, James Gardner Jr. of Easton, Lonnell Green of Easton, Robert Guy of Cordova, Shelton Hawkins of Easton, Dionte Hynson of Easton, Kirk Hynson of Cordova, Arthur Jackson Jr. of Easton, Dwayne Lovett of Easton, Dondre Phoenix of Easton, Richard Potter Jr. of Easton, Tremaine Thomas of Easton and Richie White of Easton

### Kent County

Jamie Barrett of Chestertown, Jammale Brown of Chestertown, Devone Comegys of Chestertown, Lamonte Cooke of Chestertown, Eric Daniels of Chestertown, Tracy Ferguson of Millington, Jeron Hoxter of Chestertown, William Pauls of Chestertown, Davon Teat of Chestertown and Paul Tue III of Chestertown

### Lower Shore

Martinez Blake of Salisbury, Kenneth Burton Sr. of Salisbury, George Copeland of Salisbury, Willie Downing of Salisbury, Edward Harmon of Salisbury, Paul Jefferson of Salisbury, Tevin Kyer of Salisbury, Kevin Lindsay of Salisbury, Jermichael Mitchell of Salisbury, Kevin Mitchell of Princess Anne, Jason Phillips of Salisbury, Randolph Potter of Delmar, Dwayne Powell, Nick Purnell of Snow Hill, Chucky Smiley Jr., Walt Stevenson of Berlin, Gary Tucker of Salisbury, Shawn Tucker of Salisbury and Warren White of Salisbury



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