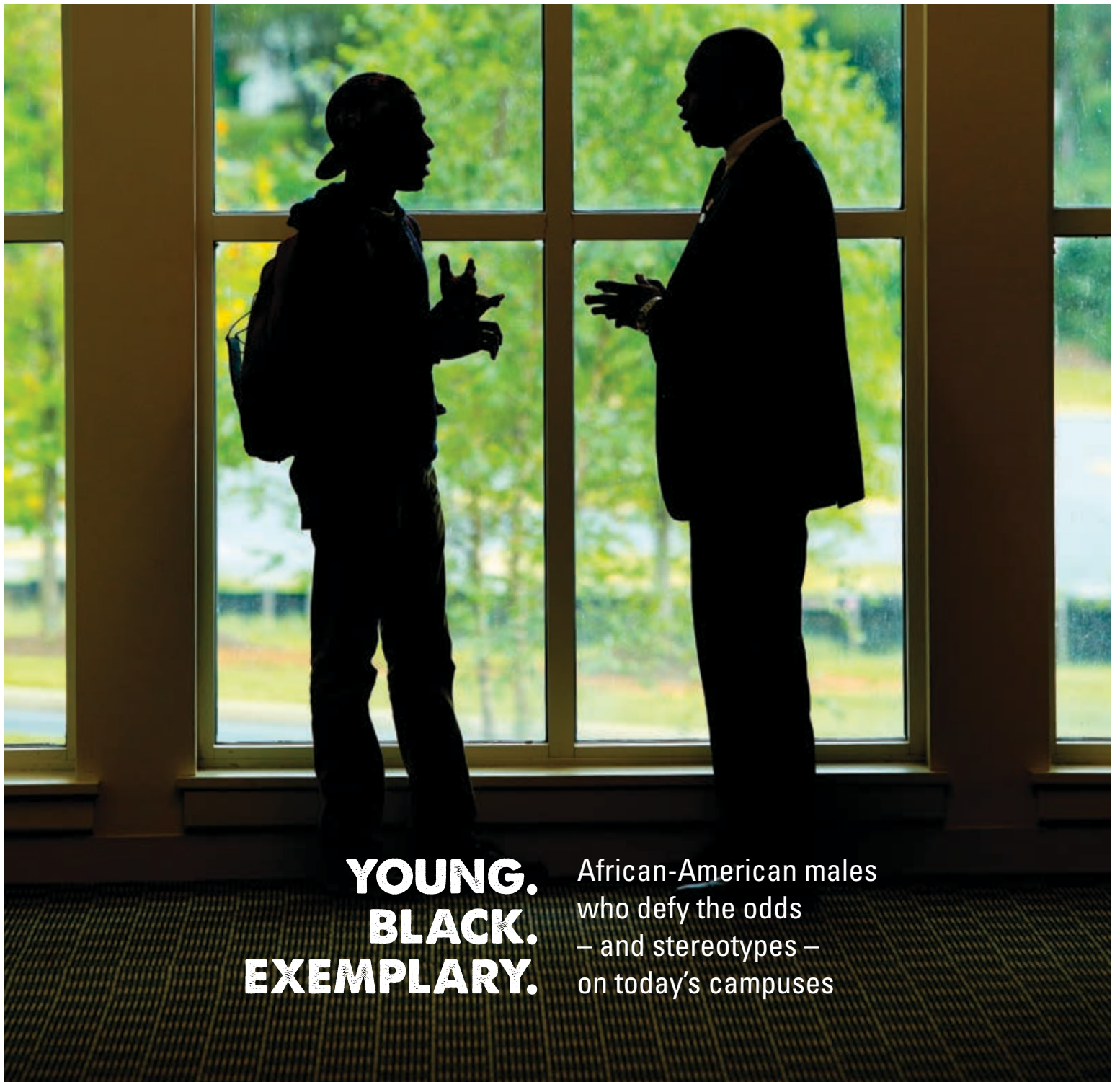


LUMINA FOUNDATION

FOCUS™

Spring 2016



**YOUNG.
BLACK.
EXEMPLARY.**

African-American males
who defy the odds
— and stereotypes —
on today's campuses



The biggest rebound of his life: Page 2



No home, but a strong foundation: Page 10



Done 'wildin' out,' he's locked in: Page 18

Editor's note: The stories in this issue of *Focus* were reported and written by award-winning journalist, columnist and lecturer Jamal E. Watson. Watson — who has written for many publications, including the *Baltimore Sun* and *USA Today* — is a senior staff writer for *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* and a regular contributor to *TheRoot.com*.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

"... We have just one world
But we live in different ones."

That song lyric, a snippet from the Dire Straits hit *Brothers in Arms*, surely wasn't written with a college campus in mind. But the sentiment fits. Many of today's students — most notably, African-American males — can feel isolated or out of place. Although they share a physical space with their white, generally more privileged peers, they don't share the same *experience*.

In fact, statistics show that, for far too many young black men, the college experience is marked by struggle.

According to the most recent Census figures, more than 45 percent of white Americans between ages 25 and 64 hold at least a two-year college degree. Among African-Americans, that figure is far lower, just 28.7 percent. Looking at success rates among those seeking bachelor's degrees, Department of Education statistics show that the nationwide six-year graduation rate for black students is 42 percent — 20 percentage points below the 62 percent rate among whites. And among black *males*, that rate is lower still: just 35 percent.



The barriers facing African-American males are nothing new. In fact, for decades, educators and advocacy groups have called for concerted action to reduce inequality and increase educational attainment among black males.

Organizations and individuals all over the nation are working diligently to address this vital issue, including the My Brother's Keeper Alliance (established in 2014 by President Obama), the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color (a coalition of leaders in philanthropy, also established in 2014) and the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), founded in 1990 by Tyrone Bledsoe, then at Georgia Southwestern State University. Bledsoe now serves as executive director of SAAB's national headquarters, and SAAB has grown to encompass more than 250 chapters on college campuses and in middle and high schools in 40 states.

These and other organizations — and the work they do — are immensely important. In fact, they're bending the arc of our nation's future because they're changing the game for thousands of young men. By turning low expectations into high achievement, they're helping write the individual success stories that this nation sorely needs.

This issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* looks closely at a few of those real-life success stories. For example, you'll read about:

- **Evan Snelling**, a high school basketball star who saw his Division I dreams shattered by injury, and then rebounded to find an even more satisfying role as a mentor to other young black males at Georgia Highlands College.
- **Kevin Lee**, a 22-year-old who's compiled a stellar academic record at Paul Quinn College in Dallas — and earned national accolades for his entrepreneurial skills — despite the fact that he's homeless.
- **Terrance Range** — who, in his teens and early 20s was an admittedly unfocused student interested only in "wildin' out" — but is now a dedicated scholar, a second-year doctoral student at Michigan State University with plans to become a college president.

In addition to these profiles in print, there's a wealth of information on our website, www.luminafoundation.org. There, *Focus* offers several extra features, including audio clips and links to current research on the effective strategies to increase attainment among African-American males. There's also a special feature on a fourth exemplary student, a special-education major at Ohio State University named **CJ Hardy**.

All of this material offers compelling evidence to counteract the unwarranted negative stereotypes that plague young American men of color. Certainly, there is much work to be done to close the achievement gap between black males and other, more privileged student populations. But the young men featured here are proof that this work is more than merely worthwhile, it's absolutely critical.

If we fail in that work — if we don't bring those separate worlds together, doing all we can to help young black men reach their full potential — we will not only cheat them as individuals, we will diminish ourselves and our nation.

We at Lumina Foundation are firm in our commitment to help these students — and *all* students — succeed in postsecondary education. It's my hope that, by sharing the stories of these exemplary students, we can inspire you to join us in that vital effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. P. Merisotis".

Jamie P. Merisotis
President and CEO
Lumina Foundation

HOOP DREAM SHATTERED, BUT HIS



SUCCESS IS STILL A SLAM DUNK



CARTERSVILLE, Ga. — Dressed in dark suits and colorful ties, about two dozen young men — most of them black — sat at circular tables inside the student union building at Georgia Highlands College on a recent Saturday morning.

These student representatives from colleges and universities across the Southeast listened attentively as Tyrone Bledsoe, founder and CEO of the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB), worked the crowd. He spoke of the powerful network he's built that focuses on improving outcomes for black college students and young black men in middle and high schools across the nation.

Evan Snelling, a highly touted prospect during his high school years in north Georgia, saw his basketball career derailed by serious injury during his senior year. Now 25, he's found a new direction at Georgia Highlands College.

Bledsoe recounted the origins of SAAB, or Brother2Brother as it's called here at Georgia Highlands. These programs have provided a safe space for black males to gather and talk freely about a wide range of issues, he said.

"Saving lives!" Bledsoe shouted in the call-and-response tradition of the black church in the United States.

"Salvaging dreams!" the students respond in unison.

And then, with little prompting, the young men (there were three whites among the cohort) jumped from their seats and began to embrace each other and exchange contact information.

For more than two decades, long before the Obama administration launched "My Brother's Keeper," Bledsoe has traversed the nation, building SAAB and Brother2Brother.

"It's good to see policy catch up with practice," he said about the president's MBK efforts. "We have a national crisis."

But at a time when scholars disagree over how best to improve the situation for young men of color, Bledsoe's approach of actively engaging the men to ignite their own change has caught the attention of national funders

and policymakers. They see the SAAB model as one with staying power.

Still, Bledsoe — a former administrator at the University of Toledo, where he served as vice president for student life and special assistant to the president — knows that the focus on young men of color has become trendy in recent years, with new support and advocacy groups vying for dollars and recognition.


"We've been doing this for 25 years," he said. "Now black males have become a fad. Some (efforts) are genuine, but some are not."

For his part, Bledsoe is focused on helping black men stay enrolled in college — and graduate. He wants them to form lifelong partnerships and tells these SAAB student leaders that they should sponsor a series of activities to show members how to invest their finances and strategize for long-term success.

"Many of you have distractions and noises in your life that you need to quiet down," he tells the young men, many of whom affectionately call him "Doc." He urges them to be proactive in helping their brothers who lag behind. "We are college-going, college-staying, college-graduating."



Evan Snelling meets with Rashad Robinson, one of many Georgia Highlands students for whom Snelling serves as a mentor. Snelling, who earned an associate degree in criminal justice in 2014, now works for the college as a career coach.

A photograph of two men in business suits walking on a paved path on a college campus. The man on the left is Black, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and red tie. The man on the right is white, wearing a dark blue suit, light-colored shirt, patterned tie, and khaki pants. They are engaged in conversation. In the background, there is a large brick and stone building, a young tree with orange decorations, and several students walking. The scene is outdoors on a sunny day.

Snelling confers with Jonathan Hershey, an associate professor of English and the college's dean of humanities. Hershey has long directed the Brother2Brother program at Georgia Highlands, an effort that aims to improve success rates among the college's black male students.

It's that kind of tough talk that Bledsoe knows is needed to transform these young lives.

"Brothers want love. Brothers need love," Bledsoe tells the young men, encouraging them to be vulnerable with each other as he doles out hugs. "I've had brothers tell me, 'Man, I don't hug dudes.' But you can't save me if you don't touch me."

CARRYING ON THE TRADITION

Evan Snelling was seated in the back of the room, listening to Bledsoe. He's heard the speech before and, on first glance, he's not easily distinguishable from the current college students.

Now age 25, Snelling grew up in the Atlanta area and always planned to attend college. That was the expectation of his mother, who raised Evan and his older sister alone after a divorce when Evan was just 7. His relationship with his father has been distant but cordial over the years.

"Although my mother did not have a college degree herself, she always instilled at a young age that we were going to college," said Snelling, pointing out that his sister went on to earn a master's degree.

Like many young African-American males, Snelling loved basketball. It consumed his life. And given his natural talent, he thought the sport would be his key to a bright future. "Basketball was going to be my ticket," he said matter-of-factly. "I really saw myself playing basketball professionally."

Snelling, who stood 6-foot-3 by age 16, played varsity basketball during his freshman and sophomore years at North Cobb High in Kennesaw, Ga. News of his skill spread quickly, and his game caught the attention of college recruiters nationwide who were interested in signing him. "I was ranked top five in the state of Georgia," he said.

But a tragic accident changed Snelling's life. In January 2008, early in his senior season, he arrived at the high school at 6 a.m. for daily practice. He parked his car and was walking across the street in the winter darkness when, out of nowhere, a car turned the corner and struck him. Snelling flipped through the air and slammed through the car's windshield.

The news was not encouraging. Though he had survived the accident, he would need years of intense rehabilitation, including seven separate surgeries in one year to speed his recovery. He fractured a tibia and fibula, and he broke every bone in his neck but one — a fracture that would have led to paralysis.

"I did have basketball scholarship offers at big-time Division 1 schools," Snelling said, "but after the accident, they were reluctant to say the least." After high school, he enrolled at Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Ga., but his mind was elsewhere.

"I was still down about the accident," he said. "That definitely changed my whole trajectory. Going from being a highly sought D1 prospect to being in a

Beneath a Brother2Brother poster, Snelling meets in his office with Georgia Highlands student Karicka Culberson. Snelling is proud of what the college has done to aid young black men. "We built brotherhood and camaraderie that African-American males need to survive in college," he says.





wheelchair for six months and on crutches for another six years was tough to handle."

Depressed and unable to focus on academics, Snelling dropped out after one semester.

"To be honest, Emmanuel told me that if I could get healthy, they could give me a scholarship," said Snelling. "That's why I chose that college in particular."

At age 21, Snelling returned home and looked for work. He eventually landed an eye-opening job as a deputy with the Bartow County Sheriff's Office. "I've always been passionate about criminal justice," Snelling said. "I saw an opportunity and I jumped on it."

But the job was short-lived. Snelling worked as a deputy for only about six months before becoming disillusioned by the "disconnect between police officers and younger African American males."

Recognizing his need for a college degree, particularly since his chance of becoming a college athlete had long passed, he enrolled at Georgia Highlands College, a two-year institution with five campuses and a student population of 5,500.

Admittedly, Georgia Highlands was not his first choice. But the tuition was affordable.

"I didn't want to let my mom down," recalled Snelling, who added that his first semester at Georgia Highlands

was overwhelming and challenging. "I struggled academically," he said.

At the urging of his mother and sister, Snelling decided to get involved in campus life.

As he walked to and from his classes, he was often approached by Jonathan Hershey, an English professor and the college's dean of humanities. Hershey, who is white, is the longtime director of the Brother2Brother program and has long been interested in improving the retention and overall campus climate for young black males.

"I would see him hanging out in the gym," recalled Hershey. "I kept encouraging him to get involved, and over time he just started coming to our meetings. It didn't take him long to become a leader within the group."

Initially, Snelling was not impressed by the weekly gatherings of 10-15 black men.

"My overall reaction was I didn't like it," said Snelling who remembered listening to one alumnus of the program who returned to campus as a guest speaker. He criticized the "brothers" for not holding up the standards of the organization. "I took it as a personal shot," said Snelling.

But it was also a personal challenge for Snelling to help move the group forward.

His interest in the group was further piqued when he learned of the enrollment and retention statistics for black



Though working full time at Georgia Highlands, Snelling also studies at home, taking online classes in pursuit of a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership from Dalton State College. He also vows that he'll "keep going and earn my master's."



Snelling, once a leader on the basketball court, now leads in campus conference rooms. He regularly directs meetings of B2B and of a campus program called GHAME (Georgia Highlands African-American and Minority Male Excellence).

men at the college. Only about 4 percent of African-American males graduate, although Georgia Highlands officials point out that Brother2Brother participants are five times more likely to graduate than other black males.

Within a year of joining the organization (which has chapters at all five campuses), Snelling was elected the event coordinator for the Cartersville chapter. He later became president and worked to increase membership in the organization by 15 percent.

"We spent time creating standards about dress and appearance," said Snelling. "We talked about the importance of sitting in the front of the class, and raising our hands and asking questions."

Snelling said relationships among the young men blossomed into strong friendships during his tenure as president, and membership soared to about 120 black males. The college currently enrolls about 600 black males.

"We built brotherhood and camaraderie that African-American males need in order to survive in college," said Snelling. "We assigned an accountability partner to every brother and encouraged early-bird advising and enrolling in classes where we knew we could excel."

'A FEARLESS, ENDURING INDIVIDUAL'

When Snelling graduated from Georgia Highlands in 2014 with an associate degree in criminal justice, college

officials were so impressed with his development and growth that they offered him a position on campus funded through the federal Workforce Initiative and Opportunity Act. In this role, Snelling helps students find jobs by assisting with resume writing, conducting mock interviews and helping them develop networking skills.

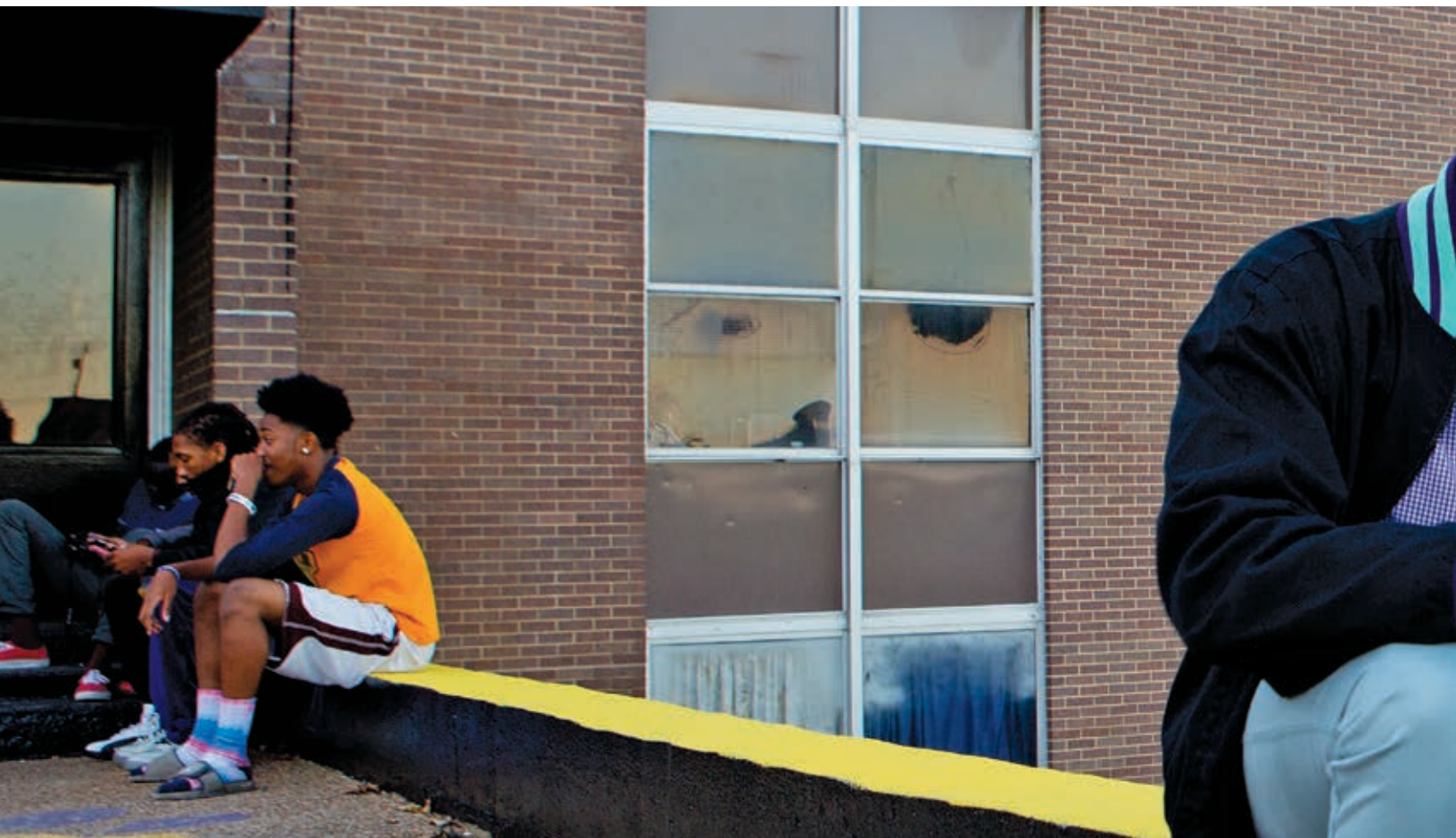
He is also an adviser to Brother2Brother, working closely with Hershey to recruit members. In recent years, the Georgia Highlands chapters have been recognized by the national office of SAAB. He also helps out with the men's basketball team — an unpaid but welcome opportunity to stay involved with the sport he loves.

"Evan is a fearless, enduring individual who has faced a lot of adversity in life and has grown tremendously through his involvement in SAAB," said Bledsoe. "He is a person who has never given up on life. He's done whatever he thought it took to bring about greatness in himself and people around him."

Snelling is now pursuing his bachelor's degree in organizational leadership at Dalton State College. He is taking online classes while continuing to work full time at Georgia Highlands.

"I'm not going to stop after I get my bachelor's degree," Snelling vows. "I am going to keep going and earn my master's. I have a passion for giving back. ... And that opportunity is available for other young brothers as well." ■

HOMELESS, YES ... YET ANYTHING



DALLAS, Texas — It's Friday morning and the students at Paul Quinn College (PQC) — a small, private Historically Black College and University (HBCU) affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church — have gathered in the campus auditorium for weekly chapel.

This Friday, however, is hardly routine.

It's homecoming weekend, and scores of alumni have returned to campus for a series of festivities, culminating in Saturday's tailgating party followed by the men and women's basketball games.

Paul Quinn College (PQC) student Kevin Lee (center) helps pay his way through school by working as a residence hall adviser. Here he shares a laugh with two of his dormitory mates, Vincent Owoseni (left) and Jaytee Paramore.

BUT HOPELESS



PQC is Texas' oldest HBCU, founded by the AME Church in Austin in 1872. It relocated to Waco in 1877 and made a second move more than a century later, this one financed by Comer J. Cottrell Jr., a noted black businessman based in Dallas. In 1990, Cottrell, founder of Pro-Line Corp., spent \$1.5 million for the 131-acre campus of the defunct Bishop College on Dallas' south side and handed the property over to PQC officials. And his generosity didn't stop there. By the time of his death in 2014, Cottrell had contributed at least \$3.2 million to the college.

Despite that largesse, PQC has had its ups and downs. In 2009, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools revoked the institution's accreditation, citing financial and academic concerns. PQC has since been accredited by Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools. At one point, enrollment dipped below 200.

In recent years, however, the college has enjoyed a slow but steady renaissance under the leadership of President Michael J. Sorrell.

The charismatic and visionary leader initiated a series of bold and controversial changes after he assumed the college presidency in 2007. For example, he implemented a business dress code for students, shut down the school's football team (which was costing the college too much money) and converted the football field into an organic farm.

More important, Sorrell went after some of the nation's best students — those typically drawn to top-tier HBCUs such as Howard University and Morehouse and Spelman colleges. He barnstormed the country, visiting urban centers like Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta and New York to directly recruit high school students — particularly black males — urging them to join what he has dubbed the "Quinnite Nation."



Lee is greeted warmly by Michael J. Sorrell, PQC's president. Sorrell, who has gained national recognition for his leadership of the Texas HBCU, awarded Lee a presidential scholarship and has become his mentor and father figure. Sorrell has high praise for the 22-year-old, saying: "He has a shot to be extraordinary."



Lee is unquestionably a serious student, but his talents don't end in the classroom. In fact, rapping as "K-Rocz," he brought down the house at the college's homecoming talent show.

TOUGH ROAD TO CAMPUS

Kevin Lee, 22, wasn't one of Sorrell's recruits. He arrived on campus after a series of devastating blows that might have caused anyone else to throw in the towel. When Lee was 16, he and his mother had lost their home after the house they rented in Pittsburgh was condemned by the city following a flood. They moved from state to state, eventually finding refuge in a Salvation Army shelter and living out of trash bags.

Determined that her son would get a quality education, Tamara Williams learned about the McKinney-Vento Act, a federal law that requires state education agencies to provide homeless students with equal access to public education.

But even that process proved daunting, as President Sorrell points out: "By the time Kevin's senior year was over, he had attended high schools in two states, fought to preserve his right to be classified as a senior, missed as many months of school as he attended, and was forced

to graduate from an alternative high school program in Pittsburgh," said Sorrell. "All of which occurred while he was sleeping either on a friend's couch in Atlanta or in a shelter in Pittsburgh."

Still, Lee graduated from high school as class valedictorian and set his sights on completing college. Knowing very little about PQC, he showed up to campus for a tour with little more than his desire to excel. He was accepted on the spot and has since helped put PQC on the national map.

"As soon as I walked on campus, I was made to feel at home," recalled Lee, as he sat in his dormitory room that is equipped with a bathroom and a full closet of suits, shirts and ties. "I knew that this was the place for me."

In the two years that he's been enrolled at the college, Lee has become something of a celebrity and poster child for all that's good about PQC. For example, he's been elected president of the freshman and sophomore classes; invited to participate in the competitive



INROADS business program and tapped as a White House HBCU All-Star — the first in the history of the college.

As if that was not enough, with a 3.7 grade-point average, Lee was one of the youngest participants in the Introduction to Diversity in Doctoral Education and Scholarship program hosted by the University of Pennsylvania and the Summer Institute for Emerging Managers & Leaders program held at the University of California. He was hand-picked to participate in an exchange program with Duke University, and is now completing an internship with the insurance firm Chubb Corp.

And this fall, just days before homecoming, hundreds of entrepreneurs and local visionaries converged on the PQC campus and met Lee during the Dallas Social Venture Partners' bigBANG! conference, an annual event that seeks to foster innovation in the nonprofit sector.

The year before, Lee had bested competitors twice his age to win the event's "fast-pitch" competition.

"There he is," one local businesswoman whispered to a friend as Lee took to the stage to greet this year's fast-pitch competitors. "I wonder if I can take a picture with him."

What idea made Lee an entrepreneurial rock star? A comprehensive plan to improve the food trucks serving the city by using produce from PQC's organic farm to create healthy meals. And the prize? A check for \$20,000 to bring his vision to reality.

A FAMILY TRAGEDY

For all of his success and accolades, Lee has had to cope with personal tragedy. After he completed the summer bridge program in 2014, he learned that his



Lee's serious side came out during another homecoming event — a presentation he made to alumni of the college. The crowd was visibly moved by his personal story of overcoming homelessness to attain academic success.

only uncle had been gunned down on the streets of Pittsburgh. His killer was never apprehended.

"My uncle was my role model," Lee said. "I decided that I was not going to let his death stop me. And I remember two things that he always told me: 'Stay on point, and stay sucker-free.' That's what I've been doing."

Well-mannered and finely dressed, Lee addresses his elders with "yes, sir" and "no, ma'am." Though he is a mover and shaker on campus and goes to great lengths to defy the stereotypes often assigned to black males, he is also a typical college student who loves to show off his dance moves and rapping skills.

At a late-night talent show in the campus center, "K-Rocz" as his friends tend to call him, has the students on their feet, moving to his rhymes. The performance is so riveting that Lee wins the competition and is awarded a gift card.

"He does everything well," said Vincent Owoseni, 19, a junior from Brooklyn and one of Lee's closest friends on campus. The two were roommates last year. "We are like-minded people, so we hit it off right away."

Lee says he's been able to soar in part because of the continued guidance he receives from Sorrell, who has become a father figure. The two talk about everything; no subject is off-limits.

Lee's relationship with his biological father, who lives in Pittsburgh, has long been complicated. But in recent years, the two have become closer.

"He's got a shot to be extraordinary," said Sorrell, who awarded Lee a presidential scholarship that helps to defray his costs of attending PQC. "Our job is to push him past his comfort zone to discomfort, because it's in discomfort that growth occurs."



PQC President Michael Sorrell introduces Lee at the homecoming alumni gathering. Sorrell, who has a law degree from Duke and a doctorate in education from Penn, has similarly high hopes for Lee, who is majoring in business and pre-law at PQC.

Sorrell, who earned law degree from Duke University and a doctorate in education from the University of Pennsylvania, would love for Lee to consider a JD/MBA program once he graduates from PQC. "He has the temperament for it," Sorrell said. "We will prepare him for it."

But ultimately, it will be up to Lee to determine his career trajectory.

"A master's degree is definitely in the plan," said Lee, who is majoring in business and pre-law, "but I'm open to working on a Ph.D., too."

'MY SON JUST HAS THAT FIRE'

Meanwhile, Lee is still homeless — one of more than 200,000 students in Texas without a permanent home. Thanks to Sorrell, Lee — who is also a resident assistant — lives year-round in a campus dormitory.

And his mother, a longtime government employee, lives in a group homeless facility in nearby Fort Worth. A series of health challenges has made it difficult for her to work, but Lee makes the 45-mile trek from campus to visit her nearly every day.

"I am so proud of Kevin," says Williams. "He's so humble. Most people wouldn't even believe our story, but my son just has that fire and passion in him to want to learn."

On the morning of chapel, Lee showed up to his biology class a few minutes late. He was understandably tired. The night before, he was rapping and dancing into the wee hours of the morning.

But he was asked by Sorrell to deliver the keynote address at chapel, and he takes the assignment quite seriously. Sorrell tells him to speak from his heart, to tell his story, to talk about being a young black man determined to succeed in a society that in many ways has already counted him out of the game.

Without notes, Lee approached the podium. His fellow classmates hung on his every word. Some were visibly moved as he described setback after setback but explained how he remained vigilant and committed to his individual goals.

"You can't tell me that God doesn't have a plan and can't change a situation," Lee said.

Amen. Yes! All right, Kevin! the audience shouted back, transforming the college assembly into a praise and worship service.

And then Lee summoned another student to the front of the auditorium.

Like Lee, he and his family had lived in a homeless shelter. The staff at the shelter had told the man about how Lee had gone on to become a student at PQC and suggested that he follow suit.

The young man heeded their advice and is now enrolled at the college.

"I was in a shelter, but I was there for a reason," said Lee. "If I wasn't there, he wouldn't be here."

The crowd shook their heads in unison. Lee's message was resonating.

"You wouldn't look at either of us and say we're homeless," he said. "But God has a plan for us." ■

Kevin Lee visits his mother, Tamara Williams, who has worked tirelessly to give her son educational opportunities despite dire financial circumstances. Ailing, homeless and often unable to work, Williams lives in a group facility in Fort Worth. "I am so proud of Kevin," she says. "My son just has that fire and passion in him to want to learn."



ONCE AN AIMLESS ATHLETE, NOW



A STEADY, SERIOUS SCHOLAR



EAST LANSING, Mich. — By his own admission, Terrance Range almost didn't make it.

Growing up in Plant City, a small Florida city 25 miles east of Tampa, Range said that he lacked the self-discipline and focus he saw in other students.

In fact, his grades were so poor that high school officials gave the football star an ultimatum during his senior year: Pass the standardized English exam or repeat the 12th grade.

"I drifted a lot in high school," recalled Range, who barely passed the exam and went on to graduate with his fellow classmates.

Terrance Range, a 29-year-old, second-year doctoral student at Michigan State University, is a dedicated scholar with a bright future. He plans to become a college president. Ten years ago, no one saw that coming — not even him.

"By my senior year, I had a 2.0 grade-point average. I failed French and math two or three times. I can't remember ever going home and studying."

With no real plan for the future, and lacking much guidance from high school personnel, Range heeded the advice of his pastor, Maxie Miller Jr., and enrolled at Hillsborough Community College, a two-year, open-admission school with about 43,000 students. Range held down a part-time job at the local Walmart in addition to taking classes, but his grades continued to plummet.

"I was wildin' out," Range confessed when asked to reflect on his early years as a college student. While other students studied, he admits, he chose to chase girls and party with friends. "I just could not make sense of my path and journey. I was not focused at all," he added.

Today, Range, 29, is a remarkably different man. Matured by past circumstances, he's a second-year doctoral student at Michigan State University with plans to become a college president.

Range's mentors and professors praise him as a visionary leader, calling him a rising star in higher education. They talk about his unusual commitment to the plight of troubled young black males and his willingness to find new and bold solutions to the problems that plague this growing demographic.

For the past few years, Range has quietly been on a

mission to share his story with anyone willing to listen. Rather than being embarrassed by his earlier missteps, he views them as "teachable moments" for other young black men. He sees his journey — from aimless youth to baccalaureate and master's degree holder to doctoral candidate at one of the nation's top universities — as a trek that others can and should take.

He doesn't see himself as an anomaly. From time to time, he even whips out his transcript from those turbulent high school and community college years and carefully studies the proof of his dismal 1.7 GPA. He knows there are other young black males who come from similar circumstances, and with the right guidance and mentorship, they too can fully realize their full potential.

Terrance Range is on his way to doing that. But it hasn't been easy.

EARLY BRUSH WITH INJUSTICE

He was born in a racially diverse, working-class neighborhood in Plant City. His father was a custodian who worked long hours at the local elementary school; his mother, an assembly line worker at an area factory.

Blacks attended school with whites and with the children of Latino immigrants who, by the mid-1980s, had settled in Plant City in large numbers.



Range, who admits he was "not focused at all" during his high school and early college years, has clearly changed course. In addition to his studies at Michigan State, he works as a graduate assistant in the athletics department and in Residential and Hospitality Services (RHS). Here, he attends a meeting of the RHS Executive Leadership Team.



In-class presentations are now routine events for Range, who earned his bachelor's degree at Wilberforce University and a master's degree in higher education policy and organizational leadership at the University of Illinois. Here, he participates in a graduate-level class in education research at Michigan State.

Range's first encounter with educational inequity occurred during his elementary school years. Though school officials inadvertently placed him in a nearly all-white, "gifted" classroom (he did not test into the class), Range was able to hold his own, completing the work at the same level as his classmates. Several weeks into the class, he was devastated when a teacher notified him that the school had made an error and that he had to join the non-gifted class.

"That was the precursor to all of this," said Range. "I was always a great student, so this didn't feel good at all."

Nor did it help when, a few years later, his parents decided to get a divorce. The stress brought on by the split was another issue that Range, then 16, and his younger brother, Anthony Moore II, had to cope with. Range began hanging with the wrong crowd. His grades started to slip, and by the time he reached high school, his only concern was football.

"I was a football guy all the way in high school," recalled Range. "I would sit in the back of the classroom totally disengaged."

Though his father was a "savvy guy" as Range puts it, he had not gone to college. And there were few — if any — black males in the surrounding community who could talk to him about options after high school.

"No teacher engaged me actively," said Range. "There were no black male figures in my high school. We had a black administrator, but he was totally invisible to the black students."

Despite his "wildin' out" lifestyle during his community college years, Range wasn't wild about his life. Working a minimum-wage job and driving a beat-up 1994 Cavalier, he felt he'd hit rock bottom.

"I was living check to check and pushing carts at Walmart," he said. "I was working menial jobs, and I was not happy."

When his high school friends returned to Plant City after their first and second semesters in college, they told Range about their campus adventures. That pushed him to begin researching colleges and universities on his own. But what institution would accept him, given his lackluster performance in high school and community college?

He searched the Web and ultimately settled in on Wilberforce University, a private Historically Black College and University in southwest Ohio. Founded in 1856, it was the first college to be owned and operated by African-Americans.

"I fell in love with the school," Range said. "There was something about Wilberforce that resonated for me. I developed a hunger, desire, thirst and hustle that turned the tide for me."

When he received the acceptance letter in the mail, he broke down and cried. Finally, he thought, he'd been given a second chance; and this time he vowed he wouldn't fail.

TRANSITIONING TO WILBERFORCE

Range's parents were naturally excited about their son's decision to enroll at Wilberforce, but they worried about how they would pay the school's tuition. Range's father, Tony Moore, even told his son that he would have to save enough money to buy gas for the 14-hour car trip to campus.

When the two arrived on campus, Moore asked his son if he had the \$500 that he agreed to repay him for fuel. Range dug into his pocket and offered the cash, but his father pushed it back.

"Son, I never wanted the money. I never needed the money," Moore told Range. "I just wanted you to save and understand responsibility."

The two embraced. It was a father-son moment that Range and Moore both recall with fondness.

"Too many times, we enable young men; we let them sit back and we handle everything," said Moore. "I was going to get Terrance to school come hell or high water, but I didn't want him to sit back and not work for what he wanted. I wanted him to know that he had to work to get what he wanted in life."

Range majored in mass communication but struggled early on because he was less academically prepared than his peers. But over time, he excelled in the classroom and became involved in campus life, landing a job as a resident assistant in the dormitories.

When his senior year rolled around, he was the lead resident assistant, responsible for nearly 350 of his fellow undergraduates.

"Wilberforce was everything to me," said Range, who took advantage of the college's study-abroad program to spend three months studying in Rome. "Who I am is because of Wilberforce."

Specifically, Range took notice of the prominent black men on campus, including the school's former president, the Rev. Dr. Floyd H. Flake.

Flake, who served as president of Wilberforce from 2002 until 2008 and was a U.S. Representative (D-N.Y.) from 1987 until 1997, is senior pastor of the 23,000-member Greater Allen African Methodist Episcopal Cathedral in Queens.

"I saw the way he moved across campus," said Range, who often dons suits, even to attend class. "I noticed that





Range confers with Qiana Green, a doctoral student in the Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State. Green has been a mentor and friend to Range since his arrival on the East Lansing campus.

there were sharp black men in leadership positions on campus, and I watched the way they moved and how they had influence in higher education."

Another one of those influential men was Parris Carter, dean of students at Wilberforce from 2006 until 2013.

"I think the world of Terrance," said Carter, now executive director for student affairs at the University of Pittsburgh-Titusville. "He is one of those young men who is an example of why men like me do the work that we do with young black males."

Carter took an interest in Range, partly because the younger man's life experiences closely resemble his own.

"I had a similar story," Carter said. "I was really disengaged academically. I barely got out of high school. I messed around as an undergrad."

Carter praises Range's decision to forge strong relationships with mentors, calling it a move that will always serve him well.

"He is intentional about who he associates with," said Carter. "He takes mentorship very seriously. He's very good with follow through, and he will put in the work."

Tyrone Bledsoe, founder and CEO of Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) — an organization with more than 200 chapters on college and university campuses as well as in middle and high schools across the nation — has had the most impact on Range's career trajectory.

Bledsoe met Range in 2007 when he arrived at Wilberforce to help establish a SAAB chapter there.

"Terrance is an outstanding young man who has

unmatched sophistication, charm and poise in diverse settings," said Bledsoe. "He has overcome a good number of obstacles in his life and has an enormous mind and unusual intellectual maturity matched with his rich, charismatic personality."

Range continues to work as an associate consultant with SAAB, helping Bledsoe set up chapters across the country.

ILLINOIS, BERKELEY AND BEYOND

When Range graduated from Wilberforce in 2010, he knew that graduate school was well within his reach. He enrolled in a master's program in higher education policy and organizational leadership at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, completing the two-year program in just one year.

In 2012, he took a job at the University of California-Berkeley, where he was responsible for adjudicating high-level conduct cases involving student athletes. His focus, he said, was on "restorative justice."

After several years in the workforce, he realized he needed to return to school and pursue a doctorate. He plans to write about successful college presidents such as Freeman Hrabowski, the long-serving leader of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County.

Now in his second year, he works as a graduate assistant in the athletics department, where he provides career development for student athletes. He also works in residential hospitality services.



Range meets with Russell Johnson, an assistant professor of management at Michigan State. Johnson is the instructor of one of Range's doctoral courses, a seminar in organizational behavior.



Range keeps a lackluster high school transcript close at hand to remind himself of his unfocused earlier years. And, to show himself what future years might bring, he pairs that transcript with the program from a presentation he made at Harvard.

On a recent afternoon, he was meeting with East Lansing's newly elected mayor, Mark S. Meadows, as a representative of the Council of Graduate Students, the student government body that represents graduate and professional students at various levels across the MSU campus.

"I feel an obligation to get involved and to give back," said Range. "A college presidency could allow me to use my story, testimony and ministry to help others dream beyond their vision at the moment."

Tony Moore has little doubt that his son will go on to accomplish his goals.

"Terrance had a little blip for a minute. He did some not-so-smart things, but overall he has been a great son," said Moore. "Plant City was not a place that gave a lot of direction to black males. Once he got away from here and got involved, he now wants to be part of the solution. He wants to make sure that other young brothers can excel." ■



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