

# THE Messenger

## Speakers Urge Celebration of Potential

Pageant, awards are Black History Month program highlights

By LORI RUNKLE, Messenger staff writer

Guests at the third annual Black History Month program gathered at the Eagles Ballroom on Saturday night to remember the civil rights struggles of the past and celebrate the potential of young minds to create a brighter future.

The Rev. Shawn Roberts gave the keynote speech and told the crowd that we are living out our history now.

"What we do today is our history for tomorrow," he said.

Roberts stressed the importance of education for young minds and told the kids in the crowd to buy chemistry sets rather than Sony PlayStations.

"Sit down during football and basketball season and do your homework. Stimulate your minds. Winnie the Pooh said it best: 'You've got to think, think, think.'"

Roberts urged the men in the audience to step up to the plate and be a positive influence in their families.

"If the father is missing in action, MIA, we have children who are not learning to their full potential," he said.

A theme of the night was the importance of education, and Miss Black Iowa, Evette Fantroy, said that one of her goals is to help young girls look within themselves and develop their self-esteem.

"I want to empower them and show them how to be successful. As an African-American woman, I want to tell them that they are worth more than anyone can imagine," she said.

Fantroy, a student at the University of Northern Iowa who is working on her master's degree in industrial organizational psychology, was a judge for the Miss Heritage Pageant.

Seven girls competed for the crown. Each girl answered the following question.

"How do you feel about an African-American or a woman as our next president?"

Darysha Newsome said that either Sen. Barack Obama or Sen. Hillary Clinton would show the world that blacks and women are "equal in strength and intelligence and capable of becoming great leaders."

Charlene Washington and former City Councilwoman Jane Burleson won awards for their contributions to increasing awareness of the importance of black history in the Fort Dodge community.

"I brought the idea of black history to Fort Dodge in 1964," Washington said.

Washington held up the book "1001 Things Everyone Should Know About African-American History" while accepting her award and said later that she would like to see several people from Fort Dodge added to the local list.

"I would like to see Jane Burleson, state Rep. Helen Miller, (D-Fort Dodge), and Charles Clayton who headed up the committee for Frontier Days added to the list," she said.

Burleson said the event was glorious.

“As African-Americans, we need to step up and show this community who we are because we all can make a difference,” she said.

The program was hosted by the Athletics for Education and Success organization in Fort Dodge.

Reneka Clayton, AFES board member, decided to become a co-leader of the AFES girls group because she saw kids in Fort Dodge being lost to the streets.

Clayton has three daughters and said the group is doing positive things.

“The girls group is every Tuesday and we talk about everything young girls need to learn. The girls are great role models for the community,” she said.

Chelsea Clayton, Reneka’s daughter, is part of the group. She said that it is important to have confidence and believe in yourself.

“In the girls group, we learn how to grow up and be a good person. We talk about our problems and how we should act in public,” she said.

Chelsea Clayton explained other activities that AFES organizes in the community.

“The Blink program is after-school program that helps kids with their homework. There are boys’ and girls basketball teams. If people die, we help and raise money. It’s fun. It has a purpose and a meaning and it’s fun,” Chelsea Clayton said.

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