

N' Education

By D. Kevin McNeir

While African Americans have long made significant and lasting contributions to American life, society and culture, many of the deeds and personal stories of these contributors have remained unknown or ignored.

In fact, those who are truly committed to studying the complete history of African Americans realize that our story does not begin and end with slavery or the Civil Rights Movement, but rather encompasses so much more.

In order to share this history in a more personal style, a Chicago-based, non-profit educational institution, the History Makers, is in the midst of a campaign intended to share the accomplishments of African Americans from across a variety of disciplines and experiences.

But this time, instead of focusing on its standing mission of expanding an African-American video oral history archive, the organization is sending community "grips" out into neighborhoods, public schools, churches — even fraternity and sorority meetings — allowing people from all ages and walks of life to touch these legends and hear their tales first-hand.

"People still don't understand who we are or what we are doing, but we are intent on getting out the message as we continue to record and thus preserve America's missing stories," says Juleanna L. Richardson, the founder, executive director, and driving force behind the History Makers.

She has been on the road as of late, most recently in Washington, D.C., where she met with U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater and Alexis Herman, former U.S. Secretary of Labor.

Both support Richardson's efforts to start a D.C. office for the History Makers on the campus of Howard University, as does H. Patrick Swygert, the college's current president.

"We now have over 500 interviews documented and on tape," Richardson proudly exclaims. "That makes us larger than the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum."

But she adds that one of her objectives is to change the mindset of young people of other races particularly as it relates to African-American culture.

The History Makers And Isaac Hayes Celebrate B.B. King This Friday

"The stories that we are recording are important for everyone to see," she said. "When children of other races believe that families like the one shown on *The Cosby Show* aren't typical of Black America, we know we have some educating to do."

"But Black children need to be enlightened as well. Some of them still believe that the only contributions our people have made to this country and to this world have come in the forms of Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

Telling "Their" Story

What was it like to be one of the premier athletes in the Negro Baseball League or to be the oldest living player from the league?

How did a single parent mother make it from the mistake of a teenage pregnancy to become the first African-American woman to serve Akron, Ohio as the Deputy Mayor of Intergovernmental Relations for almost 20 years?

How did a young woman from New Orleans take three yards of gold lame and a metal card table and transform her business into the largest African-American female-owned manufacturing company in the U.S.?

How did one man learn how to forgive in light of the senseless murder of his father years ago in a racist small town in Alabama?

And here in Chicago, what were the challenges facing the early Black radio disc jockeys and how did they pave the way for today's emerging celebrities?

Just ask LaDonna Tittle who worked with Tom Joyner years before most Americans knew who he was and who has been on radio and television for over 30 years.

"Perseverance is the number one task," Tittle said. "And no matter what you do or who you are, education is power. With it, you can accomplish anything. But I realized early on that it was important to have a tough skin, too."

"Chicago has one of the most competitive markets and so when you make it here and can enjoy life with your peers, it's one of the most fulfilling experiences one can have."



Tittle, who currently produces her own cable television program as an art teacher for the Chicago Public Schools.

She says that being a history maker has prompted her places where children are exploring the world and their own. And she hopes to make a difference in their aspiring to even greater than she herself has reached.

The oldest living baseball player from the Negro League would be "Double Duty" Ted Radcliff, now 101 years old, who knuck with the women and visits elementary schools in his neighborhood.

These are the backgrounds and stories of just a few "history makers" — all of whom were honored recently in Chicago and have agreed to return to their hometowns to tell their stories.

Listen to them and learn. We are truly a great race of people.

This Friday night, October 24, the History Makers present an annual event, "An Evening With..." This year it's blues legend who will be interviewed by soul crooner Isaac Hayes.

The intimate interview is taped before a live audience on PBS-TV. Previous "Evenings With..." have included B.B. King being interviewed by Danny Glover, and Dionne Warwick being interviewed by Diahann Carroll.

The Evening With B.B. King begins at the School of the Holy Spirit, 112 South Michigan, with a pre-show reception from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m.

The interview program itself takes place in the Rubloff Auditorium, 230 South Columbus Drive, at 8 p.m.

For more information, or to purchase tickets (\$150), call 1900, or hit info@thehistorymakers.com.



Isaac Hayes