

Faith and joy dominate H-F High's 'Pursuing the Dream' event

BY ERIC CRUMP
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Faith and joy were the themes of the sixth annual Pursuing the Dream event at Homewood-Flossmoor High School.

Addressing the audience Andre Thomas, who founded the event his senior year in 2016, said when he took the idea for the event honoring Martin Luther King Jr. to H-F Activities Director Gail Smith, she encouraged him to make it happen, but she suggested he write a proposal and create an event that would continue after he graduated.

"As Dr. King defined it, faith is taking the first step even though you don't see the whole staircase," he said. "I did not have a clue how to put an event together. All I could see was the final product."

Thomas connected the faith required to take the first step to the feeling of joy, but he offered a nuanced view of that emotion. First, though, he asked the audience members to close their eyes for a moment of meditation on joy.

When the moment had passed, he explained that he wanted everyone to think about joy and to feel it, during the event and afterward.

"I want you to understand that joy is loaded with experiences: pain, change,



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle
Pursuing the Dream event founder Andre Thomas addresses the audience.

love and loss," he said. "Many of us in the Black community strive to feel Black joy, which doesn't disregard all our people have gone through."

He said Black joy is something people pursue intentionally, in spite of a history filled with struggle. He noted that Black history, as commonly taught, is reduced to "the slave trade, skip to the Civil War and Reconstruction, sprinkle in some Harlem Renaissance and end with the Civil Rights era."

But he urged the audience to look at

a broader history of African American people and not to limit themselves to the tragedies of the American experience.

"I encourage each of you to teach yourself. There's an abundance of information out there, and I will let you in on the not-so-secret that Black people didn't just fall from the sky 400 years ago," he said. "The pain and the struggle only came out of being told for centuries that our joy was not to be experienced, so we pushed for it, and we still are."

Tributes to the accomplishments of Black people followed with presentations by students and staff that highlighted the history of African American excellence in government, medicine, trade and technology.

A number of inspiring African Americans were featured, including poet Nikki Giovanni, musician Thomas Dorsey, artist and Dusable Museum founder Margaret Burroughs and singer Nina Simone.

A short film was shown that explained the role of African American sororities and fraternities.

One sorority member, Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller, served as keynote speaker at the event. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, the first intercollegiate historically African American sorority.

She offered praise to the Homewood-Flossmoor community recognizing it as a place where people work hard to make King's dream come true. The community is known as an inclusive melting pot.

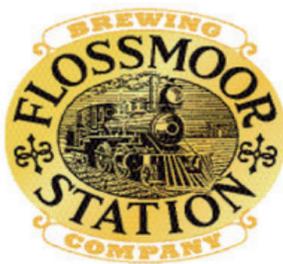
"You are known to promote diversity and encourage inclusion," she said. "People migrate from all corners of the country to be part of this community, a place where, when racial intolerance and insensitivity raises its ugly head, the community comes together, digs deep into the root cause and resolves it."

In addition to the tributes and speeches, the audience was treated to four musical performances.

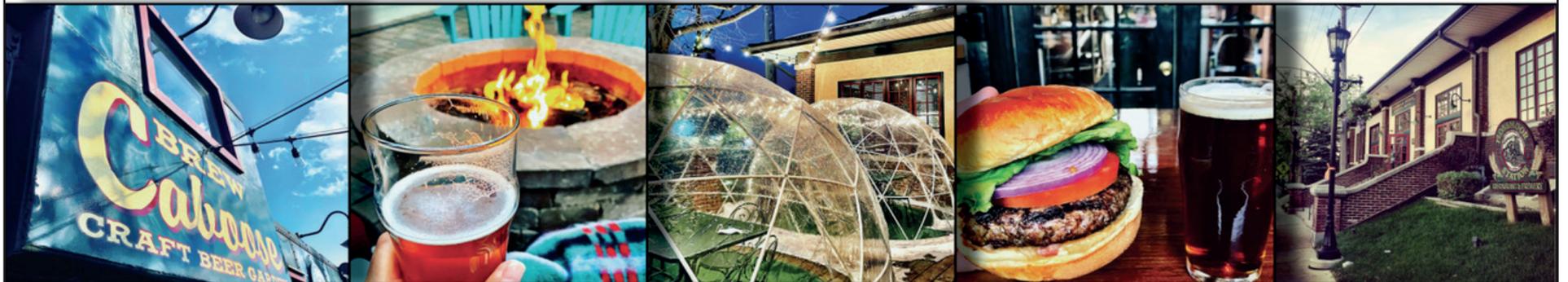
The Ayodele Drum & Dance company performed what emcee Catherine Ross Cook described as "African drums and dance through a woman's perspective." The energetic performers got the audience clapping in rhythm.

The same happened when the H-F Steppers took the stage to cheers from the audience.

H-F's Inspirational Voices group sang two gospel numbers as part of the tribute to Thomas Dorsey, and Sha'Mya Cosby sang "Feeling Good" following the Nina Simone tribute.



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