

WILLIE SPEARS MAKES HIS POINT ON BLACK HISTORY MONTH

(Originally written by Celestia Randolph; Updated by TWSE)

Narcisso Massalina - nicknamed "Hawk"- was the first African American to settle in Panama City of Bay County, Florida. Maintaining this legacy of "firsts," his descendant, Willie Spears, would make ripples throughout parts of Florida. Spears makes his mark as the first African American head coach at Suwannee High School of Live Oak, Florida and Escambia High School of Escambia County, FL and made history as the first African American head football coach and athletic director at Vernon High School of Washington County, Florida.

His work as a professional speaker, head football coach, teacher, and athletic director were preceded by a successful beginning as a radio personality on radio stations in Panama City (FL), Oklahoma and Rochester, New York and as a host for Disney Cruise Lines after receiving a degree in Communications from



Northwestern Oklahoma State University of Alva, Oklahoma. However, when broadcasting in New York and livening up crowds as a comedian with the cruise lines seemed to leave a gaping emptiness in his life, luck would have it he was offered an opportunity to coach high school football

and he found his calling. Able to produce tangible evidence of the impact he had on the lives of others, he enjoyed teaching and coaching so greatly that, pursuing a degree in Education, he returned to school and emerged with a Master's degree.

His passion for education stems from his concern for African American students. Specifically hoping to influence the younger generations of African American male students, Mr. Spears recognizes the value of an educated male figure at the center of their academic lives. Because the majority of teachers in the U.S are Caucasian females, such youths have no authority figure they can relate to, and therefore fail to understand how the material taught applies to them. To correct that problem, Spears stresses the importance of education, self-esteem and acceptance, and African American history, a subject which he is passionate about sharing. His website, williespears.com, as well as his YouTube

channel, highlight lesser known African Americans of notable character and remarkable stories.

One such figure would be Oscar Holmes, a barrier breaker who became the United States Navy's first African American commissioned officer and pilot, as well as the first African American air traffic controller. A brilliant chemist, he graduated from West Virginia State College in 1936 and obtained his masters from Ohio State University three years later. He taught chemistry at Claflin University in South Carolina for a short term before quitting due to insufficient pay. Holmes embodies the strong, intelligent American role model citizens from all backgrounds should strive to follow, but also reminds African American students that the fruits of hard work and education are meant to be harvested by them as well as their Caucasian peers: the concept Willie Spears ardently promotes.

Currently a licensed minister, Spears uses his communicative talents to address audiences of all demographics, and visits churches, elderly social organizations, youth groups, schools, educators, teams, companies, and inmates. He capped off 2017 at the Camellia Bowl in Montgomery, AL where he was tasked with the prayer at the Bowl Breakfast. This year, so far, he has visited with schools in Florida to drop a bit of knowledge and a few beats on those students at assemblies for Mentors Matter Month and Celebrate Literacy Week. He opened the assembly by beat boxing!

He has played major roles in Martin Luther King Jr. events and participated in marches. In Blountstown, Florida, he was a keynote speaker at their annual march and subsequent church service. He has served as keynote speaker at the Bay County NAACP MLK breakfast, however in 2017 he was asked to read a poem by the NAACP President, Dr. Rufus Wood. Spears decided to write a poem about the current state of Black America in Bay County titled, *This is Getting Old*. He speaks to thousands every year, from the Southeast (Georgia, Alabama, Florida) and American Midwest (Kansas, Oklahoma), to Hawaii, New Mexico, and even Alberta, Canada. His goal: to add value to the life of the listener.

After so many years working with youth, he was inspired to author a book that would encourage teens to make the right life choices. He published his first, *Keisha's Dilemma*, in 2008, and continued her story as a trilogy, including *The Ultimate Dilemma* and *Derek's Dilemma*. A couple years ago, Spears published a motivational book: *Transforming Your Life from Good to GREAT! Daily Nuggets of Wisdom*.

Willie resides in Montgomery, Alabama with his wife and two children. He is a former co-host of Blab TV's morning show The Daily Brew, and now is currently the Head Football Coach for George Washington Carver in Montgomery, AL. Willie Spears has taken advantage of living in the civil rights capital of the world. He has enjoyed visiting historical landmarks and spending time learning more about the historic city. His son attends the prestigious Valiant Cross Academy, an all-boys Christian school that correlates to his personal mission statement about education and life.