Men of Vision and Excellence Conference

On Saturday, August 11, the Southwest Florida Chapter of the Florida Diversity Council along with title sponsor, Hodges University, held the first Men of Vision and Excellence (MOVE) conference. This event, designed to reach middle/high school, college, and young professional men, was conducted at the Ritz-Carlton Tiburon Golf Resort in Naples. This conference, the first of its kind, attracted more than 100 attendees. The goals of the conference were three-fold. The first was to encourage middle/high school students to discuss the obstacles they face, to remain in school, to excel academically, and to seek higher education. The other two objectives ran along a similar line: to encourage college men to complete their academic careers, and to address the needs for young professionals to make themselves marketable.

According to Gail Williams, the President of this chapter, “This conference provided an environment for young men, professionals, and mentors to come together and engage in dialogue about important events and topics.” Young men from all over the Southwest Florida area attended this forum.

The one-day event offered a variety of activities for all those in attendance. The day began with a meet-and-greet over a continental breakfast. Following the breakfast, a general informational session brought everyone together. The highlight of the morning was the age-appropriate breakouts sessions. Middle and high school students were able to meet with mentors and talk about the challenges that they faced. They engaged in conversations and exchanged contact information with those who offered insights. The college-aged young men also met with local leaders. These leaders offered advice for achieving goals and developing leadership potential. The young professionals were challenged to give back and step out as potential leaders.
The mentors, in all three groups, addressed the issue of overcoming opposition to goals and achieving aspirations.

A buffet lunch followed these sessions and provided an additional opportunity for networking. The highlight of the afternoon was the presentation made by Dennis Kennedy, the Founder and CEO of the National Diversity Council (NDC). Mr. Kennedy offered his personal story as example of how a young man could be his own worst enemy. He reached back into his high school and college days, highlighting examples of poor choices and attitudes. During his presentation, Dennis explained that a young man needed to develop several positive attributes. Among the seven that he addressed, he emphasized integrity, honesty, and a positive attitude. His presentation was well-received by everyone in attendance.

Following Mr. Kennedy’s presentation, a panel of local leaders offered advice about a variety of topics that these young men and upcoming professionals could face. The panel was composed of several local leaders: Brian Follweiler, Harold Weeks, Dr. Joseph Pepe, Horton J. Webb, Pastor Robert King, Jr., and Lee Pitts. These gentlemen challenged the attendees to set goals, find mentors, seek advice, and make positive choices. They agreed that life could be full of challenges, but that those challenges could be overcome. A Q & A session provided an opportunity for the participants to ask specific questions.

The day ended with sponsor recognitions and raffles. One high school student won a tablet, donated by the Collier County NAACP. One college student won a satellite radio, contributed by Emblem Enterprise, a local Hispanic-owned business, and one young professional received a nutrition kit. Wal-Mart, an event Gold sponsor, provided a number of gift cards. Additional raffle items were received from Tropical Smoothie and Inferno Mixed Martial Arts. Feedback for all attendees was positive, with many planning to return next year. The Southwest
Florida Chapter of the FLDC was honored to be the host of this prestigious event, taking the opportunity to develop leaders who are educated and aware of all aspects of diversity and inclusion.