

Black achievers hold career cluster groups

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Community News Editor

Fourteen-year-old Ronnell Robertson isn't sure what career he'll choose when he graduates from high school, but when he does make a decision it will be an informed one.

Robertson was among about 40 middle and high schoolers who participated in the Black Achievers Career Cluster workshops held Saturday, March 14 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Winston Lake Family YMCA. The purpose of the workshops, which included journalism, law and government, medicine, business, and computer science, was to allow the students the opportunity to receive firsthand knowledge on a variety of career options from African-American professionals already in the fields.

According to Carole Ragins, director of the Black Achievers Program, the students not only acquired an insight into their chosen careers, but also mentors to help them achieve their goals.

"I think they (speakers) had a very big impact on the kids," said Ragins. "Many of them (kids) had come into my office and expressed that they (the presenters) were really good; that they had learned a lot about what they wanted to know about different careers."

"They were mostly impressed with the fact that most of the mentors told them, 'Look, you can come and see me anytime. Call me anytime. I'll help you get into school. I'll give you recommendations.' So it was that rapport that they had established with these very successful Black people in our community, and it made a difference in the kids' attitudes, I think."

Robertson, an Ashley Middle School student, attended the session on journalism, lead by Marilyn Roseboro, executive assistant to Winston-Salem State University Chancellor Cleon Thompson, and a lecturer on Mass Communications at the university. He says although he has not yet made up his mind about a career, the session did provide him with information that will be key in his decision-making process.

"I thought Ms. Roseboro was very well-spoken, and she made the job field seem very interesting," he said. "I think journalism would be very well for a job opportunity."

Other speakers who shared their knowledge and experiences, in addition to Roseboro, were Attorney Jasper Brown (law/government), Salem Vest (medicine), Terry Worrell (business), and Anthony Transou (computer science).

Brown, a labor law attorney with the National Labor Relations Board, was more than glad to speak to the students. "I think that those of us who have come through the black experience, and those of us who have gone through the educational experience, should go back and offer our experience and our education, and any knowledge that we have to the students," he said.

"I have probably come through some of the same experiences they are presently going through. I have some things in my background that they can relate to. So I hope that they picked up on some of the things, as far as the preparation needed to go into law, and the problems that one would encounter as an African-American going into law," he continued.

Roseboro stated that she was glad to see students who have not even reached high school yet, taking steps now in choosing their career goals.

"I'm particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to talk with these students and to see that so many of them are not seniors. They have not waited till the last year of high school to give serious consideration to career options and how they might go about achieving their career goals," she said.

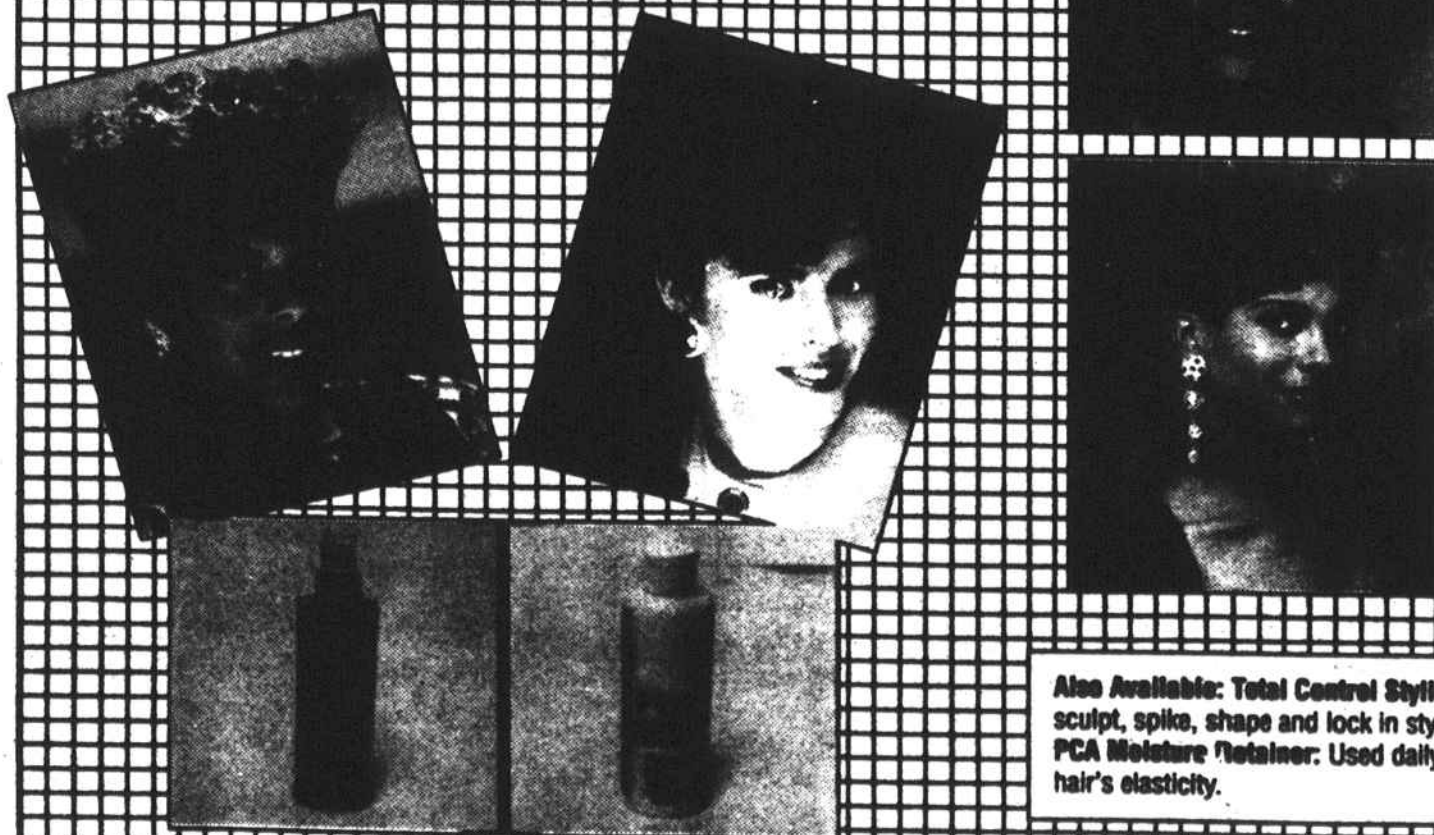
"The fact that they're coming as

sophomores, and I even had one young man who's a freshman; to have young people at that age to give serious thought to their career options, is really refreshing. I think many times, if they wait too late to start thinking about this, they make choices that are not necessarily what they want to do, but they feel compelled or pressured into making a specific choice," she continued.

Saturday's cluster groups ended a series of sessions in which African-American professionals came to speak to the Black Achievers participants, which totals about 94 teenagers. According to Ragins, the sessions will pick up again in the fall, but until then, the students will have plenty of other activities to help them make the right educational and career choices.

"We will be looking at the colleges. We'll have workshops dealing with personal development; workshops dealing with how to choose the right college, how to narrow down your decisions and how to get money to go to school," she said. The students will also be going on tours of selected colleges both in-state and out-of-state to allow them to see firsthand what the colleges can offer academically and culturally. And in May, the program will offer tutoring sessions to help the students with their final exams.

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