

# Men praised for exhibiting best traits of fatherhood

BY TODD LUCK  
THE CHRONICLE

Father's Day came early at the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center.

On Sunday, the Center held its Second Annual Honor Your Father and Do the Right Thing program. Any and everybody was invited to attend to pay tribute to their father or father-figure.

S. Wayne Patterson's kids accepted the invitation and publicly praised their dad before a crowd of more than two dozen.

"My father is a good dad, he is a great lawyer, he supports us," Wayne Patterson Jr. said of the elder Patterson, who is the president of the local NAACP.

Maurice Johnson remembered her late father, Walter Pitts, who was a well-known teacher. Johnson said away from school, her father enjoyed spending time in his garden. In the classroom, he cultivated young minds, developing a reputation as a strong disciplinarian in the process.

"If the teachers had any trouble with the students, especially the young men, 'Go on down and see Mr. Pitts' and they knew what was going to happen," said Johnson, whose father later became a truan-



Photos by Todd Luck  
**S. Wayne Paterson Sr. with his children (front, from left) Jarrell, Alexis, Lance and (back row) Wayne Jr.**



**Never Stop Dreaming's Sonya and Ray Henderson with Ben Piggott.**

cy officer. Johnson also used the event to talk about her grandfather, Columbus Pitts, who was the second settler to purchase land in Happy Hill, the city's oldest African American community. She recalled his generosity as he shared food and other necessities with his neighbors. Johnson is paying homage to her grandfather and others with her ongoing efforts to restore historic Happy Hill cemetery, where Columbus Pitts is buried.

Ben Piggott, the director of Russell Community Center, affectionately recalled growing up on a tobacco farm in Columbus County with his father, the late Benjamin Howard Piggott. He talked of working long hours in the tobacco field, work so grueling that it left him and his siblings "too tired to get into trouble."

Piggott doesn't have any children of his own, but he said he feels like a father after spending much of his adult life as a mentor and youth leader.

"I don't have any biological children, but in the community of



**Grimes**



**Johnson**

he viewed Piggott.

"When younger men see me, I want them to see a positive image like I saw in Ben," said Patterson.

Steve Grimes also gave his perspectives. Grimes also grew up without a father, and he too relied heavily on role models. The one-time NASCAR pit crew coordinator says he tries to positively influence and motivate youngsters whenever he gets an opportunity.

"Small dreams are for small people," Grimes, who now owns a car detailing business, often tells young people. "If you dream big you can achieve it."

The non-profit Never Stop Dreaming, Inc., co-sponsored the event with the Russell Center. During the program, Never Stop Dreaming highlighted kids "doing the right thing" in a video made by local filmmaker Nathan Ross Freeman and the organization's founder, Sonya Henderson, a singer and former Wake Forest basketball player. The brief video showed local kids participating in art projects, playing basketball, performing in step shows and taking part in other activities. Never Stop Dreaming is hoping to someday create programs to engage kids using activities like the arts and basketball.

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