



Photo by Layla Garris

The twins share their poetry with RJR students.

Twins

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the children we interact with on a daily basis," Mills said. "The other two percent is about what we as adults can do to help them."

Chukwuocha, who was Born Elbert Mills but changed his name to the Nigerian Igbo moniker, which he says means "my father is within me," has taken his community service one step further; he was elected to Wilmington's City Council in 2012. Adding the public service to an already more than full time job is no easy task, Chukwuocha admitted, but it allows him the opportunity to do more good than ever.

"Now you're at the table and problems that you see in your community, you're part of the solution," he said. "...It's tough, but I think that on the other end, it's a sacrifice that you have to make for the good of society and for our world."

Mills said he and his brother feel "blessed" to be able to do what they love every day. He encouraged the students to find their own passions in life and pursue them unabashedly.

"That's my motivation - that's what drives me," he declared. "I have to make this place better for these children, and that's what motivates me to always want to get up and do more."

The twins say one of the pivotal moments in their journeys as poets



Reynolds High Photos

Student poets Caitlin Thomas (top) and Lilith Bachelder perform.

came when they authored a poem in memory of their younger brother, who was tragically killed when he was struck by a stolen car. Today, they use the art form to help the young men and women they encounter open up and express their feelings, challenges and hopes for the future.

"Honesty is one of the ways in which we use to break down that barrier," Chukwuocha said. "We try to let them know that truth is their best weapon."

Gardner

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encouraged to read Gardner's book and partake in a series of programs inspired by the autobiography, which was a bestseller before Will Smith played Gardner in the 2006 hit film.

"Anytime I see any piece of that film, I always have the same exact thought: those people spent \$70 million to recreate what I did with nothing," he said.

The movie and book tell the story of how Gardner, after earning a spot in the competitive training program at the prestigious Dean Witter Reynolds brokerage firm in San Francisco, became homeless and spent nearly a year living on the street while in the program.

Even more challenging, he was a single father at the time. In the movie Jayden Smith, Will Smith's real life son, portrays Chris Jr. as a five-year-old. In reality, Chris Jr. was only 14-months-old during Gardner's ordeal, in which he and his son slept in train stations, airports and bus terminals and washed-up public restrooms. Gardner would sometimes go without food so his son could eat. When they both got to eat, he said, it was sometimes because he'd made money by giving blood.

No matter how hard things got, Gardner said he never contemplated abandoning his son. Gardner himself never knew his biological father, and his stepfather was an abusive man he swore he'd never be like.

"I made a decision as a

five-year-old boy: when I grow up, become a man and have children, my children are going to know who their father is; that would become the most important decision I ever made in my life," he said.

His struggles paid off big time. Gardner earned a position at Dean Witter Reynolds in 1982 and would have an extremely successful brokerage career. He established his own firm, Gardner Rich & Co., in Chicago in 1987.

Despite rising to the top of his field, his family is the source of his pride. He fondly recalled speaking at Hampton University for the graduation of his daughter, Jacintha. She was "the first person in the history of my family since we got off the slave ships over 200 years ago to graduate from college," he said.

It's been a little more

than a year since Gardner lost his companion of 20 years, Holly Ann Norwick, to brain cancer. He said watching someone he loved die changed his perspective on life. He left the brokerage business after a 30 year career. He describes his current job as "CEO of Happiness." He now devotes his time to motivational speaking, sharing what he calls "spiritual genetics," the fundamental part of



Jarrell

people that determines their course in life. He encourages everyone to find what they're passionate about and pursue it.

Attendees gave Gardner a standing ovation both at the beginning and end of his speech. Attendee James R. Jarrell, a retired librarian, said Gardner's book is stocked in the small library at the Arbor Acre retirement community, where he lives

and mans the library. Arbor Acres also held its own panel discussion on the book and screened the movie.

"It's interesting," Jarrell, a Winston-Salem State University alumnus, said of Gardner's story. "I do feel a person can be anything they want to be if they have the drive and the motivation."


Assistant Library Director Elizabeth Skinner said Gardner's book was selected for On the Same Page to spotlight the issue of homelessness. It's an issue familiar to the Central Library, as many local homeless men and women spend their days there before returning to shelters at night. The library received a federal grant earlier this year to hire a homeless liaison to help connect homeless library visitors with services and hold sensitivity training for library staff to help them better serve these men and women.

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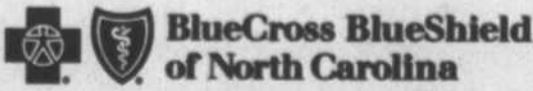
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