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LEADSTORIES

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Student lock-in focuses on future

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The doors at Cedar Shoals High School were shut and locked Friday afternoon, just as at the end of every week.

But during the past weekend, the school's halls weren't empty and silent. They crackled with the sparks of youthful creativity, intelligent discourse and saxophone music long into Sunday afternoon, as Cedar Shoals' Gentlemen on the Move, an academic/fraternal order of young African-American males, held their end-of-semester exam lock-in.

Gentlemen on the Move, currently comprising approximately 15 Cedar Shoals students, is the brainchild of Dr. Deryl Bailey, a professor of cross-cultural counseling at the University of Georgia.

Bailey says he began the program as a way to pass on his personal experiences of success after surviving the harsh, low-income neighborhood of his youth in Durham, N.C.

"I always knew that I had to do more than the next person," Bailey says, crediting his beloved grandmother Burnetha Holmes with giving him the spirit and will to persevere.

He passes that spirit and will on to his young charges now, and rarely settles for excuses.

"Using racism and oppression as an excuse (not to succeed) is one thing I will never let these guys do," Bailey noted.

Four-hour mandatory weekly meetings are dedicated to academic study and issue-discussions bent on shattering the stereotypes associated with the African-American male in today's society.

The Gentlemen strive for excellence in school, work, play and appearance, even dressing up in ties and

slacks one day a week at school. In the words of 16-year-old amateur saxophonist and aspiring photographer Ben Stevens, the group is more of a family that seeks to "(promote) a sense of pride and knowledge in the African-American community. We try to set an example."

This past weekend, noses in books, they moved a little closer to that goal as they resigned themselves to rigorous study and little play.

The mandatory Gentlemen on the Move lock-in began at 4 p.m. Friday, as members began setting up sleeping quarters in a darkened foyer of the Cedar Shoals Drive high school. By the end of Sunday afternoon, they had spent nearly 12 hours studying in order to, in the words of Stevens "focus on what (we) need to be doing."

When not studying for their upcoming exams, the young Gentlemen took study breaks, ate meals provided by supportive parents and local businesses like Subway, and even attended a church service Sunday morning at Oconee Presbyterian.

Stevens and fellow student Stacy Smith used the downtime to practice their saxophones in a secluded stairwell.

Bailey, along with his wife Brad Bailey, a science teacher at Cedar Shoals, and BeeGee Moore, a teacher at Clarke Central High School, stayed with the boys over the weekend. Tutors from both high schools volunteered their time as well, dropping by to provide academic tutelage as the boys prepared for their tests.

Surprisingly, the Gentlemen say that spending the weekend in school is actually an enjoyable experience.

Garrett Winfrey, a bright-eyed 17-year-old who plans to do something in the medical field, notes that the group tends to make he and his peers mature a little quicker.

"There are stereotypes that we face," said Winfrey. "People think that black guys are all just a bunch of thugs. But we're not all thugs. We're showing that."

The guys all say they sometimes face ridicule from fellow students who don't understand the need to better themselves, but never enough to keep them from their annual lock-in, an experience punctuated by five-minute breaks every hour and taking turns at the shower.

"Mr. Bailey is dedicated," says 14-year-old Maurice Glenn. "If he wasn't he wouldn't have called me (Friday) night at 11 p.m. to make sure I was coming."

Bailey admits he has little tolerance for anything other than complete dedication.

"I want them to define success in their own terms," he said. "But they have to move forward. They don't all have to succeed right away, but they do all have to make progress forward."

For the guys, the group is both a means to better themselves and a way to connect with each other toward a common goal.

"I used to have an attitude and I didn't like school," said 17-year-old Ty Whitehead, who hopes to enroll in Clark Atlanta University or Florida A&M to study business marketing. "I don't like school any more now (than I did), but at least now I understand the importance of it, you know? It's going to help me get where I need to be."

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