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### **Percy L. Julian Students Get Inspiration for the Future from African American HistoryMakers**

*Submitted by DaVaun Sanders @davaunwrites*

Students returning to Percy L. Julian School in south Phoenix on September 17 were provided a welcome dose of encouragement for the coming school year.

As part of "Back-to-School with The HistoryMakers," a nationwide program aimed at "inspiring youth to greatness," African American trailblazers Jim Tilmon and Ora Higgins visited their classrooms to share their life stories and offer inspiration to several groups of students.

The HistoryMakers is a Chicago-based non-profit organization with a mission to gather 5,000 interviews of well known and unsung African Americans into an impressive archive and oral history online. Tilmon is a former Emmy-winning newscaster, accomplished pilot and musician. Higgins made her mark as a business integration expert with Spiegel, the first African American to oversee such a progressive business initiative.

Other HistoryMakers slated to participate in the nationwide initiative include former US Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Civil Rights Activist C.T. Vivian and Former Ohio Congressman Louis Stokes.

"By bringing these living legends into the schools," said Julieanna Richardson, Founder of the HistoryMakers, "we raise awareness about the achievements of the accomplished African Americans in local communities."

"You can overcome any difficulties that you may encounter and become a great student," said Ora Higgins. She received her Master's degree in Business Law from Northwestern University before her groundbreaking work at Spiegel. She wowed the classroom with her resilience - Higgins is 100 years old. She exhorted every student to reach for success.

"I encourage you to become a great individual. Study hard."

Jim Tilmon also stressed the importance of education, and emphasized that Julian students were part of a global workforce.



*Ora Higgins encouraged Percy L. Julian students to "study hard."*

“Do you realize where you stand on the world stage?” he asked. “You're not competing with the people in this room ... the people in this school. You're competing with people around the world.”

Tilmon shared several stories about his extensive aviation experience, which stemmed from seeing his first airplane at the age of five. He challenged the eighth-graders to take active steps toward identifying and achieving their dreams. To aid in this, Tilmon passed on a three-part formula for success, given to him by his father:

- You have to want it.
- Believe you can do it.
- Be willing to pay the price.

“If you don't even want to do something,” he said, “You're literally drifting, just ambling through life and whatever happens.”



*Jim Tilmon implored Percy L. Julian pupils to to take active steps toward identifying and achieving their dreams.*

The inspirational efforts of Higgins and Tilmon are certainly welcome in Arizona, a state with abysmal education rankings as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics. Arizona recorded a 6.7 percent high school dropout rate for the 2007-08 school year, which was an improvement from the prior two years, but still ranked 3rd worst in the country.

Tilmon's warnings against student nihilism are echoed in a 2010 report by Arizona State University's Morrison Institute for the Arizona Minority Education Policy Analysis Center (AMEPAC). The findings offer that “the aimless portion of Arizona's workforce is on a treadmill” and “preventing aimlessness and career planning should begin in middle school.”

Richardson created the back to school component of the HistoryMakers, “to respond to President Obama's call for public service in a real and meaningful way.”

It is painfully apparent that Arizona must conquer some daunting obstacles in order to guide our state's youth to a more promising future. The impassioned examples of African Americans such as Higgins and Tilmon set a higher personal standard that we all could do well to follow.

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