



Trailblazer shares with second graders

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Carl Long has experienced a lot since he left the cotton fields of South Carolina in 1951 to play professional baseball. On Friday, Long shared his experiences with second grade students at Northeast Elementary.

Long, a Kinston resident, told students about his struggles as a Negro League baseball player in the segregated South.

Long is participating in a series of national speeches called Back-to-School with the HistoryMakers program. The program seeks to confront issues of youth violence and inspire youth to greatness.

HistoryMakers is deploying African-American leaders into schools in nearly 30 states across the country to recount their own school experiences and the struggles they encountered.

Long's granddaughter, Laytoyha Polk, is a teacher at Northeast, and was honored to have her grandfather speaking to her students.

"The children were very intuitive," Polk said. "Even though they didn't understand some of the names and dates, he kept emphasizing education, and that's something they can relate to."

Most of the children's parents weren't even born when Long broke the color barrier in the Carolina League or became the first African-American deputy sheriff in Lenoir County. But his stories of playing professional baseball with Hall of Fame players like Jackie Robinson and Hank Aaron excited the audience.

Juleah Williams, a second grader in Danielle Dingus' class, said Long inspired her.

"He told me to get my education so I can be anything when I grow up," Juleah said. "I want to be a basketball player."

Principal Kecia Dunn called Long a trailblazer.

"(The students) have to have an understanding of history," Dunn said. "They have to have an understanding of how far people of color have come. Mr. Long and others are the ones who have provided the opportunities for the children today."

Long, said he normally speaks to adult audiences, but had no problem engaging the students about the importance of staying in school.

"If you have a goal, tell someone about it," Long said as he implored the class on what they wanted to be when they grow up. "Don't keep it in."

The HistoryMakers' Executive Director, Julieanna Richardson, said she launched the program in response to President Obama's call for public service in a real and meaningful way.

The back-to-school program includes several U.S. Congressman and television personalities, such as Carol Moseley Braun, C.T. Vivian, Marla Gibbs and Soledad O'Brien.

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