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Graduate Of City Schools Shares His History

Ex-State Sen. Sanford Cloud Advises Bulkeley Students On How To Succeed

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HARTFORD —

Sanford Cloud knows a bit about history — he's made some himself.

Born and raised in Hartford, a graduate of city schools, Cloud was the first African American lawyer hired at the city firm of Robinson and Cole in 1969.

He served two terms in the state Senate in the late 1970s and, in 1994, became the first African American president of the National Conference for Community Justice.

Cloud, 65, brought recollections of his accomplishments to Bulkeley High School Friday, and offered some advice to students on how to become successful, themselves.

"Anytime I can get to talk to young people and share the good and bad of a life's journey," Cloud said, "I'm always amazed at how someone gets inspired by something someone said that makes a light bulb go on."

Cloud's talk at Bulkeley was part of "Back to School with History Makers," a one-day national effort organized by History Makers, the nation's largest African American video oral history archive, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Cloud was among more than 200 African American "history-makers" speaking at schools in 30 states.

National participants included former U.S. Sen. and Ambassador Carole Mosely Braun, former Ohio Congressman Louis Stokes and civil rights activists Roger Wilkins and C.T. Vivian.

Cloud, who is among more than 2,000 "history-makers" to have been interviewed by the organization, met with 10 students for lunch and was interviewed by a reporter for the school's newspaper before speaking to a larger audience of more than 200 students.

Denis Becirovic, the Bulkeley senior who interviewed Cloud, said it was "amazing to listen to his life story."

"I thought it was wonderful and influential," he said, adding that he took Cloud's advice to heart. "It means a lot, especially to students."

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Cloud began his talk with a nod to his high school alma mater.

"I'm a Weaver grad, so I hope you don't hold that against me, and I have the Bulkeley tie on," said Cloud, who was given the tie as a gift at the luncheon.

Cloud went on to recount his life's journey, growing up in the Westbrook Village public housing project, finding work as a 13-year-old golf caddy at Tumblebrook Country Club in Bloomfield, attending city schools and getting put on a bus by his father at age 17 to go to the University of Arizona.

"That was the first time I saw him cry," said Cloud, who would transfer to Howard University in Washington, D.C., to study law after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

There he worked for Sen. Thomas Dodd and met his son, Sen. Christopher Dodd. The two became lifelong friends.

Cloud said the experience of caddying, which included carrying the bag for then-Gov. Abraham Ribicoff, introduced him to the world of lawyers and doctors who encouraged him to go to college.

"The experience of being exposed to something I hadn't seen before opened up my eyes," said Cloud, who encouraged the students to take their education seriously, "be open to opportunity when it comes your way" and try new things.

"Finally, I say you've got to be good to yourself, be honest with yourself and others and treat others as you want to be treated," he said. "If you can do that the world is going to come to you. Maybe not the way you think it should, but it will."

Kimberly Childress, theme coach for the school's humanities studies program, said Cloud's appearance at the school matches the program's focus of "what it means to be human."

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