

Les Brown proves motivation works

By Patrick L. Thimangu
Journal writer

In six hours Wednesday, renowned motivational speaker Les Brown made more money in Kankakee than most people make working full time in six months.

Brown admitted he did not tell the 1,800 or so people came to listen to him anything new. Instead, he fired them up — rekindling energies they already had and fortifying resolves they had already made.

To be exact, Brown made \$20,000 by moderating a three-hour workshop and making a three-hour motivational speech at Olivet Nazarene University's Chalfant Hall. The event was organized by the Kankakee County Can Do, a multi-faceted program of the Kankakee Community Development Corporation.

Brown, 50, was accompanied by his recent bride, Gladys Knight, 51, the famed leader of "Gladys Knight and the Pips."

She did not sing but took part in the motivational session.

"Anyone without dreams is a potential menace to society," said Brown at one workshop, which was attended by about 350 high school and college students, community leaders, professionals, farmers and people from all walks of life. The setting resembled a town hall meeting where participants sat at round tables discussing various issues.

"We must be willing to do things things others won't do in order to have tomorrows others won't have," said Brown. The story of his life became the impetus for the workshop, which was aimed at making people realize and live their full potential.

The workshop was also aimed at helping the community maximize its human potential through integrating people of all ages, sexes and races.

Brown said the rise of crime, drug use and deviant behavior had risen in society because society had failed to collectively fight evil. He gave an example of how a handful of zealous graffiti artists can deface an entire neighborhood because good citizens give up the effort of cleaning it up.

"Evil prevails when good men and women do nothing.

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Journal/Wayne Baranowski

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Brown

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Ask for help not because you are weak but because you want to remain strong," said Brown, extolling participants to learn the spirit of cooperation in dealing with community issues.

Perhaps Brown's strongest and most meaningful messages were those that appealed to the individual, the ones that challenged people to look within themselves for strength and inspiration.

"He goes to prove you can accomplish what you really want," said Ron Dunmore, 58, a factory worker who had traveled from Elwood to hear Brown speak. He paid \$150 to participate in the seminar and was confident he got his money's worth of inspiration.

Jonathan Gyles, 14, was among the 125 or so high school and junior high school students who got scholarships from sponsors to attend the event. The students were mixed with adults at the event to enable them share experiences.

"He was inspiring and made me believe in myself," said Gyles.

Many people were inspired by Brown's own rags-to-riches story and his quest to look for his true talent. He told the audience that he spent a large part of his life not really knowing what he could do. "I had possibility blindness," he said.

Brown only began motivational speaking for pay about 10 years ago; and in that period, he has risen to become one the best in that field. He was a community activist and three-term state legislator prior to that. He was also host of the syndicated television program, "The Les Brown Show."

Brown was adopted as an infant in Miami and was labeled as an educably mentally retarded child while in the fifth grade. He studied in a learning disability class until he graduated from high school and never went to college.

"I will really pursue my dream of being a singer," said Andrew White, 15, a sophomore at the Business Academy of the Kankakee High School, after he heard Brown speak.