

Rockland boys learn lessons for Black History Month

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A mentoring group met Saturday in Spring Valley.



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Jaden Herrera, 13, right, greets Zachary Colimon, 14, at the start of an Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Black History Month mentoring program session at the Finkelstein Library in Spring Valley Feb. 12, 2017. Watching at left is Gerald H. Inman, Sr., the chairman of the fraternity's Rockland Omega Academy mentoring program. The mentoring program was established to provide academic and cultural enrichment opportunities to minority boys in Rockland County. The program focuses on skills such as computer, public speaking, etiquette training, and financial literacy. (Photo: Seth Harrison/The Journal News) Buy Photo

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SPRING VALLEY - The messages were powerful and plentiful for nine minority boys at the Finkelstein Memorial Library on Saturday afternoon.

The group listened and spoke about the importance of Black History Month as part of a mentoring program that was part history lesson, part life lesson that several boys described as "inspiring."

"It was very inspirational," Elijah Pecou, an 8th grader at Nyack Middle School, said after the group watched "Bring Your A Game," a documentary about the resilience of African-American men.

Jaden Herrera, an 8th grader at Pomona Middle School, said the film taught him that, "You can do anything no matter what you go through. It makes me want to do better."

The Saturday event, which also included a poem and a short story about inventions by African-Americans, was put on by members of the Xi Lambda Lambda chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity as part of their Rockland Omega AcaDemy (ROAD).

ROAD's mentoring program is for minority boys in grades five through 12 in Rockland County. Gerald H. Inman, Sr., ROAD's chairman, said the program was established in 2007 to offer academic and cultural guidance for boys, many of whom grow up without fathers.

"Our boys are falling through the cracks," he said.

Several mentors, members of the fraternity who live in the area, spoke to the boys about embracing education, respecting women and persevering through life's challenges.

"We each have to assume responsibility for what happens to us," Chris Sampson told the boys. "Each of us is responsible for what we become."

Sharon Nelson, a Spring Valley resident, brought her 11-year-old son, Alex, to the program. She said her 19-year-old son, Tevin, had participated in ROAD and is now attending Rockland Community College.

"He learned a lot," Nelson said. "Sometimes, as parents, someone else can get through to your children. It's very important. It's important to have outside means of communication."

Inman said there are about 15 boys in ROAD, but the group's goal is to have at least 50.

"We feel that we can get 10 or 20 boys every year and keep them for four years. The fourth year they'll be OK," he said.

"One of the problems in the African-American community is the lack of fathers. We have to find a way to get people to understand how important education is. They also have to have role models. We try to give kids something they can look up to."

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