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The Daily Iberian

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Teche Life

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Ercell Charles, who grew up in New Iberia, is back to inspire resident leaders, government officials, philanthropists and professionals to consider the value of the new millennials. Charles travels the world teaching professionals how to communicate and mentor the next generation.

‘Dare to be Different’

Inspired as a youth, inspiring founders for the future

BY VICKY BRANTON
THE DAILY IBERIAN

This week is homecoming for a school that for 30 years was the largest high school in the state. For one of its proud graduates and the first black senior class president, Ercell Charles, coming home could potentially bring monumental repercussions for an entire community and future generations.

A 1978 graduate of New Iberia Senior High, Charles was described by one of his teachers and mentors, Steven Stansbury, as a model student. He was loved and respected by students, parents and teachers. The color of his skin didn't make any difference because he had been taught well how to be generous, kind, gregarious and fun. He liked everybody and knew no stranger, Stansbury said. Stansbury was at first speechless when

‘Millennials are not going to compromise their authenticity. They are the most educated generation in history. They want to make a difference, not just a dollar.’

Ercell Charles
Motivational speaker

asked to comment on one of his favorite students. He had lost touch with Charles, who for the past 15 years has been a trainer for Dale Carnegie, and one of only 12 certified master trainers out of 3,500 professionals worldwide.

“My father taught me Dale Carnegie after giving me his books when I was 12 to 16 years old,” Stansbury said. “I taught my

students the Dale Carnegie method without them knowing what I was doing. It touches me deeply to hear this about Ercell. My father died last year at 100 years old.”

For the first time since leaving Louisiana for a job in Atlanta, following graduation from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Charles returns to New Iberia as an inspirational speaker at the annual board retreat for the Southern Mutual Help Association Inc. He also speaks at 10 a.m. today at Believer's Family Worship Center where his sisters Sandy Charles Archangel and Tammy Charles Daye, wife of Gregory Daye, are all part of the ministerial team headed by the Rev. Jeffery Archangel.

“You knew he was going to be successful,” Stansbury said. “Ercell was one of the brightest young gentleman in the class, the whole family was. His parents were awesome.”

Charles was one of 26 students in an honors class thrust on a young Stansbury, Free Enterprise Economics, a passing require-



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FUTURE: Firm roots are important to reaching ones full potential

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ment for graduation. The fifth period class of 1978 was brightest of the bright students, as described by Stansbury. They were all hand-picked and all graduated with a grade point average close to 4.0.

"Ercell never heard the words 'you'll never make it.' His parents made sure he was all honors, driven to success at an early age," Stansbury said.

Deciding to run for senior class president wasn't an easy one for Charles when his friend Bryan Lourd was unopposed. Encouraged to make a platform he believed in helped make the decision and the rest is history.

"It doesn't surprise me that Ercell is thriving," said Bryan Lourd, another successful 1978 NISH graduate who has made a major impact in the entertainment industry. "He was always a star. Happy to hear he is doing so well."

Stansbury laughed at memories of Charles in class. As a teacher wanting to instill responsibility and the value of money, Stansbury would ask his students for collateral if they needed to borrow a pen. When it was returned, he'd return the collateral. Once Charles handed Stansbury a \$50 bill to receive the much coveted pen for the assignments of the day. Stansbury said he probably did this for shock value, which was rewarded with a gaping mouth. On another occasion, Charles gave up his senior ring. In the end, the collateral always was returned, as was the pen.

Stansbury was only one of the teachers and fellow students Charles fondly remembered acknowledging their importance in his life. Touched by the fact he was singled out, Stansbury said he credited all 140 of the faculty and staff for the quality of students produced from NISH. He said George Crowson, principal at the time, depended on all the members of the Charles family including sister Sandy Charles Archangel.

"At Crowson's funeral, all of the Charles children were asked to sing," Stansbury said. "At Crowson's request they sang 'Let It Begin With Me,' appropriate for the way he and the Charles family led students."

More Than Coming Home

A reunion with his mother, Leona Chatman Charles and family, would have been enough reason to celebrate with a trip to New Iberia, but Lorna Bourg, co-founder, president and CEO of SMHA, believes he will contribute to what the organization is trying to do in Iberia Parish and South Louisiana.

Early one morning while attending a 2014 leadership conference in Tennessee, Bourg noticed a big guy with a cup of coffee leaning up against the door in an empty room where she thought breakfast was being served. She asked if he had heard the last speaker because he had been fantastic. The man answered her by saying he now felt a lot of pressure, he was the next speaker.

"When I saw him in Chattanooga, he was one of the best speakers I'd ever heard," Bourg said. "He talked about the next generation, the millennials. We have this whole process called 'Founders to Futures.' Louisiana wants and needs to look at the talents that are coming [in the next generation] and to understand them. We can't just look at them as tattooed and pierced young people. Every generation has the capacity to meet what is in front of them."

Charles asked Bourg where she was from and learned it was his home town, New Iberia.

"Everywhere I speak, no matter where it is around the world, I mention New Iberia," Charles said. "It helps that Tabasco is so well known, and although I tell them it's from Avery Island, it's close enough to home for



SUBMITTED
Ercell Charles was voted class president by his 1978 senior classmates at New Iberia Senior High. His empowering leadership continues worldwide.

them to make the connection."

Bourg told Charles her organization was re-building one-third of the city with the help of the residents and leaders of the West End, the mayor and City Council.

"You've got to be kidding me," Charles said. "I was born in the West End and my momma still lives on Anderson Street. I haven't been back for a while but I sure would love to help."

Bourg said about the generations, there was the World War II "great" generation, the builders that came after WWII, then her generation that faced the 1960s war on poverty. By the time she retires, the millennials will be in their mid-30s, she said. They are going to be deciders of government, at the port, running important divisions in hospitals and in the legislature. They'll be heading up not-for-profits and businesses. She wonders if they will be prepared and what will they face?

"Generous people can rub up against needy people every day, or periodically help, and feel good about it," Bourg said, "But, what is it we need to spend time changing so help wouldn't be needed on a regular basis, only when there is an emergency, a true disaster. Our statement first is that poverty is made faster than we can end it. Secondly, we need to end poverty, not keep servicing poverty. We feel very strongly about that."

Bourg said philanthropy to help people is good yet philanthropy needs to broaden and mature to include community development not-for-profits. They can market and make a difference through access to affordable capital and to develop leadership, two ways out of poverty. Art is another essential to bringing people together, she said.

Community development corporations are different than all the other not-for-profits, Bourg said. There's this whole transition from a plantation state and mechanization of the fields, when 98,000 men, women and children were put off the plantations and nothing was done to prepare them for new lives.



SUBMITTED
Ercell Charles is a certified master trainer for Dale Carnegie of Georgia.

Bourg also commented about the porous borders and the refugee population, which is still growing. Climate change which is huge. She said most of the populations of the world live around water stating we've got to learn how to rebuild. This is happening all over the world.

Treasuries internationally are going to be over subscribed, she said. Globalization of trade, jobs, international treaties, information technology and economic interdependence, all have consequences. Plus a lot of people are seeing all this and their anger is undermining democracy, Bourg said.

"The disparity between incomes and wealth, cynicism and anger, is going on all at the same time removing the ability to discern," she said. "It makes it non-conducive to long-term investment for long-term solutions. The nature of discourse, the anger and disfunction makes it difficult to bring anyone 'working together.' You see that in Congress of course.

"So I got to thinking, this is where Ercell fits in. He is going to teach us about the next generation. What are their unique abilities that we look at and say 'they can't pay attention'," Bourg said. "Well, maybe they need to be treated differently, grow up thinking they need to pay attention to five or six things going on at the same time."

Instant communication, though it may have some problems, she said, is going to be extremely important for crowd sourcing of information, bad and good. Maybe their particular ADHD as some people might say, is actually not a bad thing. Especially if you have inter-generational transition, which means their energy mixed with wisdom from older generations. The millennials are particularly suited to the emerging world and emerging problems of the world, Bourg said.

"They like to have meaningful things to solve and they like to get together and work as teams much more than people who use to work in cubicles," Bourg said.

"That's remarkably suited to trying to solve some of these problems and big things. They like to see the difference they can make. If they work with us as older folks, maybe we can bring some of our wisdom to their talents and that might just be a brilliant combination. So maybe providence will win out in all of this, we just don't know it yet."

Charles acknowledged his father made a great impact on his life although he died in 1998. He was a hard worker who took care of his wife and family for 47 years attending the same church all those years.

Charles said it was his mother who taught him about God and to trust what God had for his life was better than he could imagine. Although Charles knows this to be true having traveled the world, he said he believes in roots and he believes in New Iberia.

This may be a first speaking engagement for him, but now with his own company, Mentor Performance Systems, it may not be the last.

"I will always be a son of New Iberia," he said.

A defining moment in Charles' early life was his involvement with Boys State. Then Gov. Edwin Edwards was the speaker that year and challenged the boys to "dare to be different." Charles took Edwards statement to heart.

In 1978 when as class president he had wanted to transform NISH from a black hall and white corridor school into a united school where race was insignificant, he broke from the norm of white cap and gowns for graduation and robed them in gold as a unifying symbol. In his commencement speech he used the same phrase to challenge the class, "dare to be different."

For more information on Charles visit www.mpstorch.com.

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