

James Martin Middle students 'Race for Achievement'

by Cynthia Robbins, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools



Hundreds of seventh-grade students from James Martin Middle celebrated Academic Achievement Day on Sept. 10. They joined NHRA Pro Stock car driver and team owner Tom Hammonds' program, called Race for Achievement.

"I want to make sure kids know if you believe in yourself and work hard, you can succeed, no matter what your dream is," said Hammonds.

Hammonds was in Charlotte for the inaugural NHRA Carolinas Nationals, which is the first race at the new zMax Dragway at Lowe's Motor Speedway. He is partnering with James Martin Middle to encourage students to study science, math and technology.



"We are so fortunate to be adopted by Tom Hammonds," said James Martin Middle Principal Anna Renfro. "He is a great role model for our students and we are excited they will have the opportunity to learn more about science, math and technology and how it could relate to careers in motorsports."

Hammonds will visit the school each time he is in the Charlotte area for races. He is the only African-American owner and driver of a race team in professional motorsports. During his first visit, he talked to the seventh-graders about the importance of education, sportsmanship and leadership.



"He really inspired me," said seventh-grader Brandon Peoples. "I want to start my own business, and he showed me it is possible."

Hammonds played basketball before he started racing cars. He was drafted ninth overall in the 1989 NBA draft and played in Washington, Denver and Charlotte before finishing his basketball career in Minnesota. He received a bachelor of science in business management from Georgia Tech, where he also played basketball. He was the fourth all-time leading scorer and his jersey was retired.

"I was 6'3" in the seventh grade," said Hammonds. "But I was one of the lucky few who was able to play pro ball. It's important for you to listen to your teachers and your parents and try very hard to succeed."

During the assembly, Charlotte City Councilman Michael Barnes read a proclamation from Mayor Pat McCrory declaring Sept. 10 "Academic Achievement Day" in Charlotte. He congratulated the school on its new partnership with Hammonds.



During the assembly, 50 students received an O'Reilly Auto Parts Race Pack filled with goodies supplied by program supporters GM, Goodyear, MacTools, and Coke, an autographed Tom Hammonds Hero Card, and two tickets to the Sept. 12 NHRA Carolinas Nationals race at the new zMax Dragway. Students may also enter an essay contest explaining why they should be on Hammonds' crew. The winner will serve as an honorary crew member at Friday's race. After

the assembly, students got to check out the NHRA Pro Stock Chevrolet Cobalt and transporter, which is similar to a fully stocked garage on wheels.



"It would have been tough for me to be involved in motorsports if I hadn't been involved in basketball first," said Hammonds. "I want to make sure the kids coming up behind me have the same resources to achieve their dreams without playing professional sports first."

James Martin Middle is the fourth school in the United States to participate in the national program.

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