

## Partnership set Omaha native on a path to a - Omaha World-Herald (NE) - May 20, 2019 - page 1A

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Standing in a crisp gray suit and shiny black dress shoes, Terry A. Henry Jr. pushed back his long hair - "locs," he calls the thick, woven locks that hang at or below his chin. And he smiled into the May sun.

It is his moment to shine, and the 22-year-old college graduate, bound for medical school in the fall, spent a recent spring day basking in the light of his promising future.

He got this far with his own talent, to be sure, but also with help from a host of mentors and do-good programs, namely one called Partnership 4 Kids. The program offers youngsters from challenged backgrounds like Terry's with adult mentors and incentives like bikes - Terry proudly says he won four over the years.

Recently graduated from Oakwood University in Alabama, Terry returned to his native Omaha last week to give thanks and bear witness at an annual banquet that celebrates success stories like his. Put on by Partnership 4 Kids, or P4K, the banquet featured 86 recent high school or college graduates. Terry was the keynote speaker.

Before he took the stage inside the Scott Conference Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus, Terry posed for photographs outside. Then he sat against a wall, filled with quotes about perseverance and education, to reflect on his own path.

Born in Omaha and raised for all but two years in north Omaha, Terry said he bounced around a lot as a youngster - attending something like nine elementary schools in Nebraska, Iowa and Georgia, and at one point living in two different shelters while his parents were splitting up.

A semblance of stability finally came in the fourth grade. In fall 2006, Terry was then a newcomer to yet another new school, **Howard Kennedy** on North 30th Street. That's when a youth mentoring organization, later known as Partnership 4 Kids, introduced the first of a long line of caring adults who helped Terry to see his potential.

This mentor was a man from his church, Sharon Seventh-Day Adventist, who would come to **Howard Kennedy** weekly to read with Terry, who was bright, but after all his moves, behind in school. This mentor was called his "goal buddy," and he helped Terry set goals and work toward them.

Terry - who likes sports but isn't a big athlete - found that his competitive streak was in academic success, which Partnership 4 Kids rewarded. He liked to compete and get high grades and then earn prizes for those high grades from Partnership 4 Kids, which praises the achievements publicly and offers prizes, like those bikes.

"I have to do better than other people," Terry said. "I wasn't fastest on the court. I didn't have the best (basketball) skills. When it comes to those 100 math questions, though ..."

Terry's problems were not magically solved in the fourth grade. But the goal buddy, Ian Bryce, stuck with him.

Bryce taught Terry how to play the drums, took him places like Mahoney State Park and watched movies like "Star Wars" with him. A member of 100 Black Men of Omaha, Bryce introduced Terry to other would-be mentors.

Terry already knew one, another member of his church, Dr. Anthony Montegut. Montegut had escaped from his own difficult circumstances in New Orleans and has practiced medicine in Omaha.

The 100 Black Men has a motto of sorts - "What they see is what they'll be." Sitting outside that Scott Conference Center last week, Terry drew a straight line between Montegut and his own desire to be a doctor.

Terry had more mentors. It seemed that at each school he attended, each organization he was involved with, there was a caring adult who noticed him and tried to keep him on track.

A Nathan Hale Middle School teacher found a way to redirect Terry's sometimes rambunctious behavior and feed his appetite for harder math. When Terry wound up in the in-school suspension room, the disciplinarian always warmly encouraged him.

A family friend introduced him to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Omaha, which opened Terry up to even more experiences - the club helped him go to Washington, D.C., and gave him a college scholarship, and more mentors.

One of them, Jermaine Jones, put Terry in touch with doctors and was always on the lookout for internships and had networking advice.

That D.C. trip was pretty important: In 2015, Terry got a chance to personally meet President Barack Obama. The experience was an eye-opener. He took in the grandeur, the diverse crowd and the idea of smart people working together to solve problems. This was the embodiment of everything his mentors and teachers had been saying and for Terry, it clicked. Sky was the limit.

"I could do whatever," he recalled feeling. "I could become whatever."

Through it all, Partnership 4 Kids was a resource. That first mentor, Ian Bryce, remained a trusted confidante who earlier this month traveled to Huntsville to cheer on Terry at his May 11 commencement from Oakwood.

This is part of the group's mission: To provide consistency over time to young people who don't always have it. Partnership 4 Kids was created a dozen years ago, growing out of two previously existing school mentoring-incentive programs, Winners Circle and All Our Kids, started by Omaha

businessmen and their wives, respectively Jerry and Cookie Hoberman and Mike and Gail Yanney.

The programs combined to increase the number of children served, and, today, Partnership 4 Kids is helping some 5,600 Omaha young people in the Omaha Public Schools and a number of postsecondary institutions. The event on May 13 celebrated 66 graduating high schoolers and 20, like Terry, who graduated from college.

The program begins in elementary school with a focus on literacy, reading, life skills and goal-setting. Middle school participants work on academic transitions, and high school students focus on getting to graduation and setting up a plan for what's next. In addition, there is a summer program, college prep and college support.

Terry attended Oakwood, a private, historically black university, thanks in part to a Partnership 4 Kids scholarship. And while he was living there, the organization helped him with soft-skill issues, like communicating with professors, making connections, managing his time.

Terry's return to Omaha will be brief. He's here for a few weeks and then, in mid-June, he'll move to Nashville, Tennessee, and attend Meharry Medical College. He wants to be a cardiothoracic surgeon.

Terry gets the credit for college and medical school. But Partnership 4 Kids, he said, lighted his path.

And it has led him, so far into the sunlight.

erin.grace@owh.com, 402-444-1136

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