

Black Men on the RISE honors black male achievement

BY ALEXIS COLLINS ON DECEMBER 10, 2017

More than 100 students, faculty and staff crowded into Heritage Hall in the HUB-Robeson Center Friday night to celebrate the fourth annual Black Men on the RISE event, hosted by the Black Student Union (BSU). Everyone was dressed in their finest for the awards ceremony, which honored black men at Penn State for their leadership, community initiatives and personal achievement.

The event, which was hosted by Ka'lee Strawbridge, took place on Dec. 8 at 6 p.m. The ceremony began with a video from the nominees, who shared their views on what the characteristics of a black man on the rise is, and who their inspirations are. Some recipients said that perseverance and selflessness were most important to them, while others listed former president Barack Obama and athlete LeBron James as their inspirations.

“Our black men are constantly beaten down, they’re constantly taken by law enforcement and they’re not valued as much,” said Nicole Telfer, membership chair of the Penn State’s Black Student Union. “We do this program every year just to let the black men on Penn State’s campus know that we appreciate them and everything that they do, and that their work will never go unnoticed.”

DJ Erv Gotti provided the music for the night, which was full of entertainment and celebration. In addition to the actual awards ceremony, there was spoken word, dancing, and musical performances from fellow students and organizations, including W.O.R.D.S and the Dark Storm step team.

The first award of the night went to William Smart, who won the category for Academic Achievement. Smart, a senior majoring in neuroscience, is in the Schreyer Honors College and is also a Blueprint mentor.

“I wanna thank Blueprint and the black community,” he said. “Even though it’s academic achievement, I know everybody out here is doing academic achievements so I appreciate all y’all and all y’all hard work.”

One of the most notable awards was the faculty and staff award, which went to Carlos Wiley, who is director of the Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC). Wiley arrived at Penn State in 2010 and focuses on diversity initiatives and social justice within the campus community.

Wiley became emotional when accepting the award. He said that being in the PRCC all day and talking to students helped him cope after his 17-year-old daughter was called the n-word by a fellow classmate earlier in the day.

“My family has grown, it gave me the strength I needed to be in this space today,” he said. I hope that those who come to the PRCC on a daily basis, I hope that a little bit of the energy, the things that we talk about, and the things you take from me, you take it with you for the rest of your life.”

Another emotional acceptance speech came from Brian Davis, who won the leadership award for the night. Davis, who is a senior majoring in African American studies, has studied abroad in four countries and received awards for his ethical leadership. He said that despite his success he still comes from humble beginnings.

“I don’t have the best experience coming here. Many people have assumptions that I have this great life coming here but I went through a lot of stuff,” the Philadelphia native said. “Since I’ve been in high school until now, 10 of my friends have been killed. Last week since I’ve been in Philly, I just found out four of my friends are going to jail. This award is really to show black men in Philadelphia that there’s a way out. I’m really appreciative to receive this award, but all these black men in the room are men on the rise.”

BSU also hosts its annual Black Women Rock, similar awards show that honors African American women at Penn State for their community leadership and individual achievements, that event will take place spring semester.

BSU wants to show its love and appreciation for the African American men doing extraordinary things at Penn State.