



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Celebrity / Local Entrepreneurs Train Youth at Sanders' Economic Development Panel

JAMES SANDERS JR. April 1, 2016



Recognizing that not every career is built in the traditional way and seeking to inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs, State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village) hosted a Youth Economic Development Panel on Thursday at the Catherine & Count Basie Middle School 72 in Jamaica, which featured celebrity experts and local business owners who took an unconventional road to achieve their dreams.

Featured guests included Chrissy Monroe of the television show Love & Hip Hop; Jackie

Rowe, CEO of Jacqueline Rowe & Associates and former manager of heavyweight boxer, Mike Tyson; Anthony Lolli, Founder & CEO of Rapid Realty; and Chaz Williams, Founder of Safe Streets Make Sense.

“Today, we encourage the young people of Southeast Queens to take their ambitions of future success from concepts to reality,” Sanders said. “Thinking outside the box is not a new idea, but it must be considered a viable tool that will enhance each potential inventor's design plan.”

Anthony Lolli, Founder & CEO of Rapid Realty came from humble beginnings, growing up in a loving, but poor family. His desire to provide his parents with a better life ignited his determination to build a successful career. At age 19, he decided to get his real estate license. He took a course at Kingsborough Community College and started setting goals for himself. He vowed to become an expert on all things related to the real estate business and asked questions of the successful people in the field whom he encountered.

“You guys are here today to learn,” Lolli told the youth. “You’re doing the right thing. Just don’t let the learning stop. You have access to phones, to YouTube, to Google – be curious, learn. My curiosity led me to buy my first building at age 21 and to start my own real estate company called Rapid Realty.”

Lolli recruited friends and family to work with him, but when he ran out of prospective employees, he started his own real estate school, which became the second largest in New York City. He licensed over 40,000 people over a ten year span, but he didn’t stop there. Lolli eventually grew his business and it is now a national company with over 1,000 employees and 50 locations. In increasing his revenue, Lolli has been able to support over 27 different charities.

He encouraged the youth to draw inspiration from all of the panelists at the event, not just himself, and learn from their example.

“The game of follow the leader is great, when you follow a great leader – that’s the most important thing I can tell you,” Lolli said, “and follow your dreams, because if I can make it, you can make it.”

Chrissy Monroe, a reality television personality from the show Love & Hip Hop, was also inspired to follow her dreams at an early age, after being bitten by the acting bug in the 6th Grade. At age 12 she started attending the Barbizon modeling school in Baltimore, Maryland, where she lived at the time. There she took runway classes, learned how to apply makeup, polished her etiquette, and learned how to pose for professional photographs. She carried those skills on to high school where she joined the drama club and acted in plays. It was also at that time that her parents divorced. Her mother started taking drugs and her father began drinking heavily and was hardly home.

“I really had no support from my family – no one to even come to watch me act in my plays,” Monroe said. “But guess what, I still kept going. I still kept showing up. My family wasn’t there and that hurt me, but I wouldn’t let anything stop me.”

At age 29, she moved to New York seeking more career opportunities, even though she didn’t know anyone in the city or have much money.

“Everyone told me ‘Oh, you’ll never make it. You’ll be a small fish in a big pond. You’re going to be a failure,’” Monroe recalled. “My mother said, ‘There are younger, prettier girls in New

York. You'll be right back.' It hurt that even my own mother didn't believe in me, but I didn't let that stop me. I tuned out all of the negativity and I kept going."

Once in New York, Monroe started taking acting classes and doing everything she could to learn her craft. She went to multiple auditions and model castings and got signed to a lot of major modeling brands, but she still hadn't achieved her goal of being on television. Then one day a friend who knew someone in production at Love & Hip Hop helped facilitate an audition.

"I was so nervous," Monroe said. "I had to go on camera for three hours and talk about my whole life, the good, the bad, everything. They really liked me and I got a call back, and the rest is history."

Since her appearance on Love & Hip Hop, Monroe was offered other television opportunities and continues to taking acting classes and audition for movies. She offered the youth some final words of wisdom.

"I know it sounds cliché, but don't give up," Monroe said. "It really can happen for you. I never thought things were going to come through for me because I had so many disappointments, but it happened, and I'm here now living my dreams, when everyone, even my own mother, told me I couldn't do it. I made it happen because I didn't listen to that negativity."

Monroe's manager, Jackie Rowe, was also on hand to share her story. She is the CEO of Jacqueline Rowe and Associates and also managed former heavyweight boxer, Mike Tyson. She said as a child she was bullied in school and that combined with the death of her father in 1972 caused her to doubt herself and where her life was headed.

“I couldn’t understand or comprehend what was life or death,” Rowe recalled. “That led me to the streets and I started bullying the kids who had bullied me. It’s not a good thing, but I did it because I felt sorry for all the other kids who were being bullied and I wanted to protect them. That led me nowhere.”

She went to a junior high school briefly before being transferred to a “600 school,” a term for public schools that were a dumping ground for violent and disruptive students. Rowe then ended up on Rikers Island, after leaving there she got pregnant and had her first child. She went to a school for young mothers, where she learned how to plan events. Years later she ended up managing Mike Tyson and working with other celebrities like Sean “P. Diddy” Combs and Jay Z. She currently has a new management company called I Dream of Jeanie. In addition, she is also an advocate for victims of domestic violence.

“Everything you go through in your life is an experience and an obstacle for you to get to the next level,” Rowe said, adding, “Never give up. Don’t let anyone stop you or bully you from your dreams or achieving whatever goals or aspirations you may have.”

Chaz “Slim” Williams had a rocky start in life before setting a new path and becoming the founder of Safe Streets Make Sense, an organization that mentors at-risk youth and seeks to provide them with the guidance to keep them on the right path. He also works as an antiviolence advocate and organizes truces between gangs. In addition, Williams has enjoyed success in the entertainment industry.

“I knew I couldn’t change my past, but I could change the ending of my story, and so I went on to earn two bachelor’s degrees and start my own company,” Williams said, adding, “I believed that if I could conceive it, I could achieve it.”

Other speakers at the Economic Development Panel included: Todd Feurtado of the King of Kings Foundation, Kevin Livingston of 100 Suits for 100 Men, Dalton Buddington, Financial Service Manager with People's United Bank, and Cheryl Miller, Independent Associate with Legal Shield.

We would like to thank our sponsors the Child Center of NY and MS 72 for allowing us to use their space.