

Darren seated in the auditorium of Horace Mann High School, his alma mater in Gary, Ind.

BELOW RIGHT: Entrance to Darren's home — he has stayed in the community he grew up in.



"Parents need to be involved in the lives of their kids, and that's why I speak so passionately about abstinence."



activism, and social change. Yet while his career seemed to be taking off, his serious dating relationship was falling apart.

"I was dating a young woman whom I really cared about," says Washington, "but

from Gary. They attended my P.T.A. meetings. My parents were devoted to investing their time in me; they loved me, and that made me want to succeed."

Washington speaks loudly — and often — about the connection between his parents' involvement in his life and the personal success he has achieved. In fact, it's become a core part of his message when speaking to young adults.

"Parents need to be involved in the lives of their kids," Washington emphasizes, "and that's why I speak so passionately about abstinence. When you see a 19-year-old girl attempting to raise a child on her own without the help of the man who fathered the child, there are going to be some family issues there because that young lady does not have the financial, emotional, or psychological capacity to raise that child on her own. And a teacher, guidance counselor, or coach can only do so much — that kid learns from home."

Another childhood issue that Washington has recently started talking about is sexual abuse. For four months, in second grade, a trusted baby sitter repeatedly molested then 7-year-old Washington.

"When I was abused, I shut down and said nothing to anyone. I know there are a lot of young kids who are experiencing the same type of things today. So, when I'm running workshops for young single parents, I stress the importance for them to talk to their kids about abuse," he says.

LEARNING HONOR THE HARD WAY

After graduating from Millikin with a bachelor's in political science, Washington received his master's in public administration from Indiana University. During his time in graduate school, Washington served as an intern for the Indiana State Senate and the United Way of Central Indiana. While working for these institutions, he became a student of politics, community

I didn't treat her well and went out with other women behind her back. She dumped me. I begged her to come back, and she did. I was good for a few months but then went back to my old ways."

The struggling couple was sexually active, which Washington says was the focal point of the rest of their problems.

"Because I was having sex with her, I thought it was my right to have sex with her whenever I wanted it," says Washington. His significant other finally ended their relationship for good when he refused to attend church with her.

"She kicked me to the curb," says Washington bluntly. "I begged her to come back, but she said, 'No!' That was probably the best thing that could have ever happened to me — her not taking me back."

Washington now sees how his actions in this relationship were selfish and impure. A few months after the breakup, he started going to church to try and impress her back into his life. However, as Washington puts it, "[church] allowed me to meet Jesus and after that my relationship with her didn't matter — I was in the Spirit then."

Upon his spiritual revelation more than 10 years ago, Washington's life changed drastically. He rededicated his life to Jesus — as well as his sexuality — proclaiming to be a born-again virgin. According to Washington, he has lived an abstinent lifestyle ever since.

Speaking to thousands of people ranging in age from 13 to 60, both Christians and non-believers alike, each year, Washington proclaims the lessons he's learned on abstinence, honoring a woman's body, and singleness.

"I tell women all of the time," says Washington, "if a man doesn't know how to respect and honor your body, let him go, and I promise a new man will come along who will honor you the way Christ honored the church."

EMPOWERING HONOR IN OTHERS

Talking about honor is merely a small part of finding solutions to the problems Washington sees every day in high schools and churches and on the streets of Gary. He doesn't just spend time investing into the community of Gary and teaching abstinence to teenagers. He also empowers and challenges single adults, from both the inner city and suburbia, to use their time to help make positive changes in their personal lives and in their communities. He spreads this message on a more individual level weekly at his church where he serves as the singles ministry leader.

"After graduating from college, no one comes back to Gary," says Washington with frustration. "If an area is to thrive, we need young professionals who are willing to return to the hard neighborhoods and help make change."

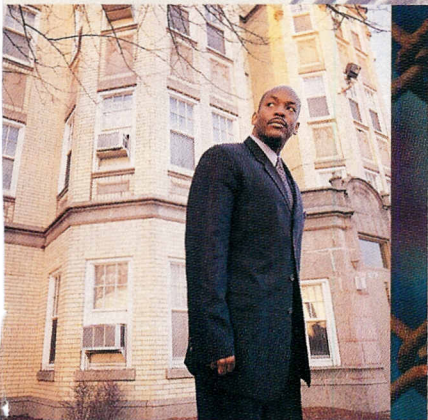
According to Washington, it's changing one's personal behavior that is the first step to reaching out.

"When I'm talking to young adults who are struggling with sexual issues, I tell them they need to get busy and see what God's purpose is for them for being on this earth.

"It gets hard sometimes," continues Washington. "People look at me and think I'm some kind of super-saint — that isn't true! I struggle too, but I thank God for His grace."

And though Washington says he's currently not seeing anyone and no prospects are on the horizon, he sees this as an ample time to dive into life and help others who are in need of hearing the truth about life, sex, and honoring God.

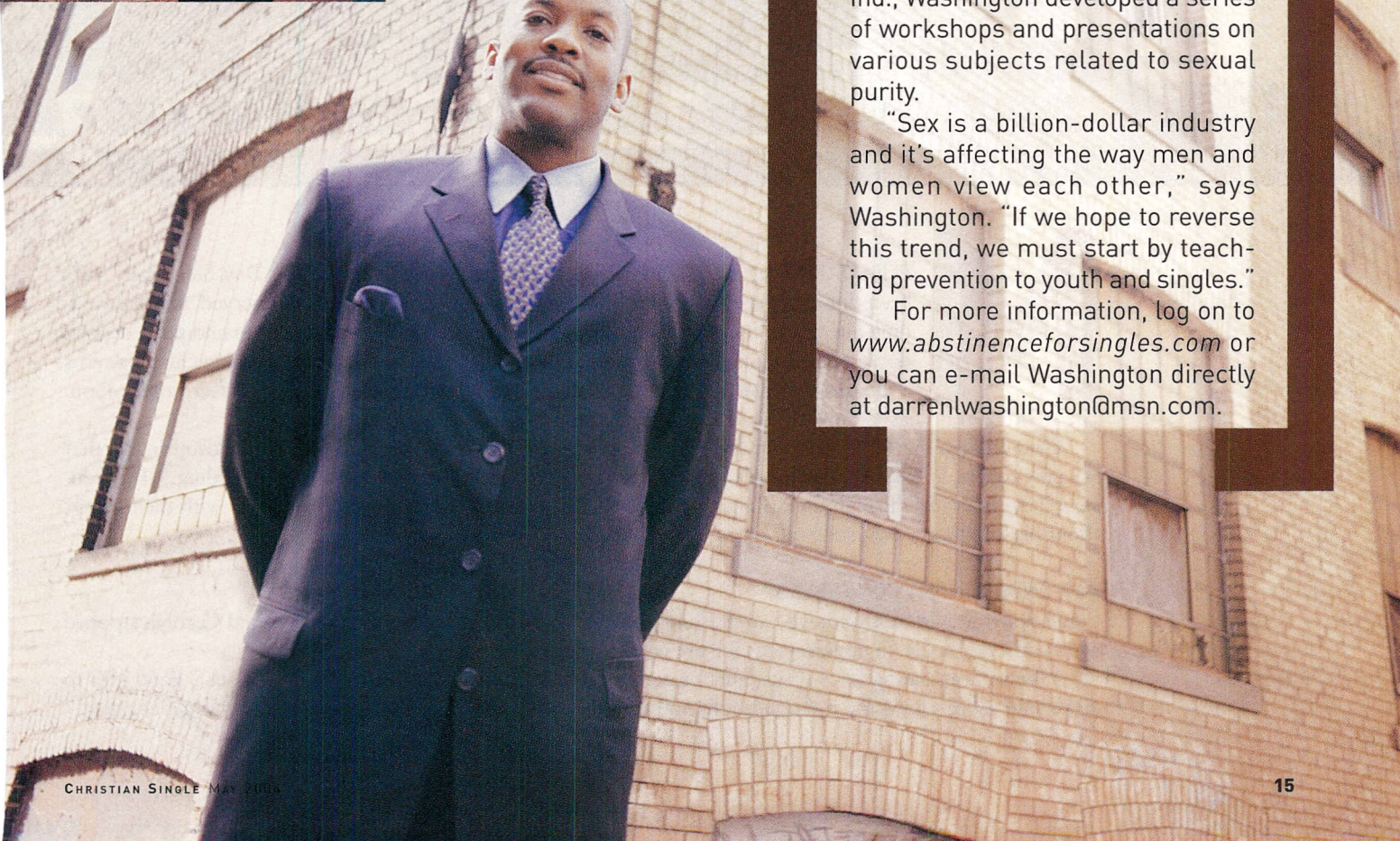
"God has given me a message and asked me to preach that message to all nations, no matter the race, religion, or sex," he stops and smiles to himself, "And that's exactly what I plan to do."



INSET LEFT: A neighborhood renovation success story

BELOW: Neighborhood
Darren is still working to
change

THE BEST CHOICE



Darren Washington is president and CEO of Abstinence for Singles, an organization he founded to more intentionally spread the message that abstinence until marriage is the best choice.

After receiving such interest and acclaim for the messages he was bringing to his community of Gary, Ind., Washington developed a series of workshops and presentations on various subjects related to sexual purity.

"Sex is a billion-dollar industry and it's affecting the way men and women view each other," says Washington. "If we hope to reverse this trend, we must start by teaching prevention to youth and singles."

For more information, log on to www.abstinenceforsingles.com or you can e-mail Washington directly at darrenlwashington@msn.com.