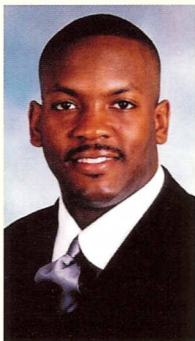


# Single alum takes family life seriously

"Building stable family values is the key to curing society's ills," says Darren Washington, a 1992 graduate who is director of external affairs for SBC in northwest Indiana.



Washington "talks the talk" as a sought-after public speaker on topics such as character building, self-improvement, substance abuse and abstinence. He "walks the walk" by putting his life on display as a single, black male who chooses abstinence, has a prominent job and is president of the school board in his hometown of Gary, Ind.

Although Washington earned a political science degree from Millikin and holds a master's degree in public affairs from Indiana University Northwest, he believes family values should not be a political issue. "I have to practice what I preach in order to be believed by the people I'm trying to reach," says Washington, who founded Abstinence for Singles and speaks to youth and adults about healthy, safe life choices and respecting themselves and others. "I have to use my life to show young people, especially young men, that they need to focus on education and not sex."

Washington, who grew up in Gary, was put in special education classes in grade school and told he was not college material. "Thankfully, my parents gave me tremendous love and support, and they insisted I could make it in college," says Washington, noting that this reinforced his belief that parents are the first and most important teachers for children. "We need men to step up and take responsibility for the children they bring into the world because children need fathers, too."

Washington says his ideas and goals for his life were formed in college, and he credits his Millikin years for giving him a career focus. "I didn't take education seriously at first," he says, explaining that his priorities were playing basketball and having fun. "I ended up on academic probation, so I changed my focus to getting an education and being involved on campus."

Campus activities gave Washington his first taste of organized democracy, and he knew it was a good fit. His interest today in government and public speaking stemmed from Millikin's Model Illinois government program. "I was terrible at first, but then my scores improved and I was told I was a natural to go into law or politics," he says. Several Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brothers suggested he get involved in community service and campus issues. His senior year, he was elected fraternity president and served on student senate. "I worked with Lin Stoner [dean of admission] and Jan Devore [then associate dean of students and currently alumni relations director] about how to recruit people of color to the university."

After graduating, Washington interned at United Way of Central Indiana, where he developed its first youth leadership program and served as an Indiana state senate intern. Next, he served as executive director of the Indiana Commission on the Social Status of Black Males before serving as an area mall manager for Simon Property Group in Lafayette, Ind., and Toledo, Ohio.

In 2001, he joined SBC and returned to his hometown, hoping to make a difference in this economically depressed area. At SBC, Washington represents the telecommunication giant's interests through lobbying, community involvement, economic development and philanthropy. He often works with his former mentors, State Senators Earline S. Rogers and Rose Ann Antich-Carr.

"I saw how children were not being prepared to get an adequate education or learning values that would help them make good choices for a successful life," he says. "But I didn't get much interest when I offered to start a program based on my abstinence and relationship workshops." Instead of giving up, Washington ran for the school board and was named its president once elected. "Now I'm working with the schools to implement these programs."

As part of his commitment to the Gary school system, Washington spends Friday mornings reading to kindergarten and first-grade students at a nearby elementary school. "It is a great joy for me," he says. "I was used to working with junior high and high school students, but now I realize how important it is to start teaching children good morals and the value of an education at a young age." As board president, he also



Darren Washington '92 reads to students weekly.

holds office hours, speaking with parents, teachers and others to share ideas for improving the school district, where more than 60 percent of the students come from low-income families.

Washington hopes to get married and have a family someday, but realizes his focus will then need to change. "I'll still promote my lifestyle messages, but I hope to train other young people to give the presentations," he says. For now, he is writing a book on abstinence and looking at options for becoming more politically active.

"God has blessed me and I believe we are all on this Earth to help future generations avoid the same potholes."