

Getting knowledge

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr. (Photos: MUL)
Friday, 28 June 2013 16:50



Attendees of the 87th Annual Minneapolis Urban league (MUL) were treated to a “private” lesson in business from trailblazing entrepreneur Daymond John, founder of FUBU and star of ABC’s “Shark Tank.”

The gala, which celebrated the civil rights organization’s 87 years of providing economic and employment resources to the area’s residents of color, was recently held at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The lesson was private in that John, who has an estimated net worth of \$250 million, admonished anyone from taping his motivational address.

“You paid to be here to get this knowledge,” said John. “Don’t record this and go and give it to someone else for free. You should tell them (anyone not in attendance) they should have been here.”

For the many who were there, John’s message was one of self-reliance and determination as he chronicled how he grew FUBU from a concept and product out of his mother’s basement to an iconic brand that has garnered more than \$6 billion in worldwide sales. John said that with just 10 shirts cleverly displayed on multiple recording artists, he positioned FUBU to be the brand of hip-hop in the early 2000s. And though FUBU is an acronym for For Us By Us, the Queens, N.Y. native said the “us” isn’t just African-Americans.

“When I say for us, by us, I’m talking about us as a culture – hip-hop is the culture,” said John, in a closed-off interview with select reporters. “You want to know who were the first people to buy FUBU? It was kids in Japan, who wanted to emulate the American hip-hop style and it was white skateboarders in Seattle.”

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In what he called his “Shark Points,” John, who now also owns the high-end brand, Coogi, called on entrepreneurs to set goals, do their homework, love what they do represent ones self as the brand and keep swimming and moving forward, even in the face of rejection. John said more than 30 banks rejected his loan request to fund FUBU, but an ad placed in a newspaper by his mother attracted the Samsung Group to invest in the up-start clothing company.

John also said at first every major retailer refused to carry his flashy brand because they did not want a certain consumer in their stores.

“I had more than one retailer tell me directly that they didn’t want street hoodlums and drug dealers in their stores,” said John. “I responded by continuing to sale to the ‘hood’ stores and after two to three years the major stores saw these little hood stores were expanding and franchising off of my brand and they (major department stores) said, ‘wait a minute, we need to get that FUBU in our stores too.’”



The League honored civil rights icon Dr. Josie Johnson for her lifetime of service to communities of color, as its 2013 Trailblazer. As a part of the celebration, mistress of ceremonies, WCCO’s Angela Davis, offered a moving video homage, detailing Johnson’s life of service, and 5th Dist. Rep. Keith Ellison presented a personal thanks to Johnson, who he said has counseled him on numerous occasions. The former director of the MUL, Johnson was the first African-American to serve on the University of Minnesota’s Board of Regents.

Johnson’s daughters, Norrene Johnson Duffy, and Josie Johnson Thomas were on hand to see their mother being honored. Johnson’s nephew, Judson W. Robinson, III, who is the president of the Houston Area Urban League, was also on hand to witness Johnson being honored.

The Gala, presented by Target and sponsored by Comcast, General Mills, Best Buy, Wells Fargo, Northwest Area Foundation, WCCO, Pentair and Insight News and others, featured the music of Sounds of Blackness and Deliverance for Youth. Presenters included State Senators Bobby Joe Champion and Jeff Hayden as well as Insight New editor-in-chief and MUL board chair, Al McFarlane.

MUL President Scott Gray served as a presenter and offered the audience a brief look at the League’s accomplishments over the past year, while outlining goals for the upcoming 12 months and beyond.

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The MUL also awarded scholarships to area high school seniors Ecajma Davis, Chaise Dennis, Audrey DeVaughn, Daja Garrett, Clareese Kitchen, Jordan Mason, DeAnthony McKinley, Rayvon Newman and Ashanti Payne, Jr.