

Making Character Count

by Chris Moody, VAS Contributor

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. famously spoke of his dream that “... my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

That speech was delivered before Ramon Williams was born, but he grew up knowing it well. He memorized it in elementary school while in the class of renowned Roanoke educator Mignon Chubb-Hale.

“I probably can’t recite it to a T right now, but certainly those words are instilled in me,” Williams says.

In a life of walking the walk, Williams has demonstrated himself to be the embodiment of King’s lofty standards. As athletes, Ramon and twin brother Damon Williams were dominant on the prep hardwood. They went to VMI together and played four years of basketball at an institution where athletics are merely one leg of a stool that includes rigorous discipline and hard work in the academic arena, along with a military lifestyle. Strong character is a requirement.

Following graduation from VMI, Ramon worked as an assistant basketball coach on Post, then had four more Division I stops, including Virginia Tech, before returning to VMI in the roll of fundraiser.

He has also served multiple terms on the Virginia Amateur Sports Board of Directors. Currently off the board because of bylaws which limit the number of consecutive terms a board member can serve, Williams is still active with the organization and looks to come back when able.

Nearly 30 years ago Ramon and Damon started their TWIN Hoops Sports Camp to pass on important lessons to youth in and around Roanoke. Although they started in 1996, the TWIN Hoops camp was built on the CORD Camp founded in 1974 by Roanoke community organizer Cathy Ross and her son-in-law Frankie Allen, who was a fresh off a college career as a standout player for the Roanoke College Maroons. He later served as head coach for several universities, including Virginia Tech.

CORD – the acronym for Community Organization for Research and Development – had the dual goals of teaching basketball skills and emphasizing the character aspects of hard work and fairness. Those values remain in the Williams’ camp, where the lessons of the military enhance the message.

“The character lessons that VMI instills, how you level the playing field so it doesn’t matter if you’re white, black, rich, poor, or whatever your background may be, we all came in the same,” Williams says. “When you think about MLK, you know to see someone not for the color of their skin but for the content of their character.”

Ultimately, Williams says, character is your most important trait.



“One of the first things we talk about at the camp is character because that's all you have,” he says.
“You want people to trust you. You want them to know your word is your bond when you make promises. You want to know your handshake means something.

Dr. King said it more than 61 years ago, but his message is still going strong today with the help of Ramon and countless others who see the wisdom of his message.