

SAAB Video Transcript

Well, I'm Tyrone Bledsoe, the founder CEO of SAAB, formerly known as Student African American Brotherhood. And we've been here in Springfield, Missouri, close to four years now.

1990, I started the first group of SAAB at a small college in South Georgia, Georgia Southwestern College. That's President Jimmy Carter's alma mater.

And so, what was going on at that time, we looked at fraternities and sororities and how they perform academically compared to other subgroups of students on that campus, campus of about 3,500 students.

And when we disaggregated the data and we looked at black males, their cumulative GPA, about 200 undergraduate black males on that campus, 1.75 was the cumulative GPA.

So that was actually just incredible for me to learn that data piece, and I sought to do something about that.

And that's where SAAB started with a focus group of students who eventually became an organization on that campus.

Now I had no vision of it being a big deal. It was simply to help those students on that campus be successful.

And you fast forward 33 years later, here we are in 41 states, close to 360 chapters.

Students get involved by way of their school districts or at a college or university. So we have partnerships with K-12 districts.

If students are at one of the schools we have chapters, they can, access membership.

There's no cost to students to join SAAB and it's open to all students regardless of background.

There's a three-pronged approach to mentoring, student to student, student to younger student, and the professional to student transaction.

So SAAB is bigger than just mentoring because we really engage young men across a spectrum of things to hopefully yield proactive leaders with a plan, students who prioritize and respect time, time management, etcetera.

Number one reason we find in our research, students do not graduate from college in particular is time management, time management, lack of time management.

So the mentoring piece is very intentional.

The students mention one another and then we are intentional about getting community stakeholders connected to our various chapters at the middle school, high school, and collegiate level.

And that could be formal mentoring, some of that could be informal, some of that could be group mentoring, but mentoring does play a big part of what we do.

The connection with Commerce after we moved here started with one of our alums, who I think you'll eventually be talking with, Javion England, who connected me with Doug Neff, and it just kinda went from there.

Eventually, I was invited to the board coming up on two years in November, and I've been on the board since then.

So, yeah, from there, we just scale with so many different initiatives that we're proud of here in the city, and we're looking to replicate, in other cities in, throughout the state of Missouri.

We wanna help young men, move from education, what you say you wanna do, and actually start doing that.

And so the business community is very important to us, the bedrock of our success in being able to connect our students with internships, with shadowing opportunities, which we have both with, Commerce.

We've had a lot of success in that area. But that education career piece is very important to help our students move from education to careers.

My name is Javion England.

I currently work here in Springfield, Missouri as a senior commercial banking associate in the commercial department.

So, I actually started off as one of the founding members of the Springfield chapter here in Springfield, Missouri.

Through Commerce right now with our partnership with SAAB, we're gonna have a mentorship program where we have three mentees and I actually mentee one of the high school students right now.

And, we also had a couple of guys who had internships with Commerce last summer.

We actually, for the past couple of years, helped sponsor the SAAB National

Conference that we held in St. Louis.

We just had, our first ever summit here in Springfield that we actually sponsored as well.

And to, partner with SAAB to have some of these young guys be able to be a part of the culture here at Commerce and, eventually join or even just get to witness and, see representation, it means a whole lot.

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