

Press Clippings 03/05/2019

---The Daily Herald---03/05/2019

U-46 board approves new 5-year contract for CEO

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Tony Sanders

Elgin Area School District U-46 CEO Tony Sanders will continue to lead the state's second-largest district for five more years.

The school board Monday night voted 6-1 to approve Sanders' new contract, which includes a salary of \$241,679 for him starting July 1. Any increase in base salary will be tied to accomplishing performance goals set forth in the agreement, which runs through June 30, 2024. Yearly increases will not exceed the state's statutory cap in effect at the time, school board President Donna Smith said.

Sanders has a master's in business administration and more than 23 years of public service experience, of which 12 were with U-46. The contract also provides for reimbursement of tuition costs for coursework required toward Sanders' earning a superintendent endorsement, Smith said.

The school board developed 13 performance goals for Sanders aligned with its vision for the future and the district's strategic plan. Priority is given to math education in kindergarten through sixth grade, school safety, and utilization of district facilities.

"They are very robust goals attached to this contract that Mr. Sanders is very excited to accomplish," Smith said. "And we are continuing to evaluate based on the performance indicators we have used in the past."

Board member Phil Costello agreed that the contract provides "concrete measures" toward making progress.

Board member Sue Kerr added the contract was "challenging" but good for the district.

Board members agreed Sanders has done a good job since taking the helm after former Superintendent José Torres resigned in August 2014 to head the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora. Sanders previously served as Torres' chief of staff.

"We recognize the success," said board member John Devereux, noting that "we've got continued work to do."

Ensuring the district has a strong leader for the next five years provides some continuity, he added.

School board member Jeanette Ward cast the lone dissenting vote, saying she didn't support the length of Sanders' contract and favored a three-year extension instead so as not to tie the hands of future boards.

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Larkin grad David Otunga starring in new 'Medea' film returns to Elgin for special screening, visit to his alma mater

By: Gloria Casas



- Actor David Otunga, who's co-starring in Tyler Perry's "A Madea Family Funeral," attended a screening of the movie at Marcus Elgin Cinema Saturday with his nieces, Emee Clement, 8 months, in her uncle's arms, and her sisters, front to back, Zari, 4, D'Anyia, 9, and Wynter, 8.

David Otunga grew up watching movies at the Marcus Elgin Cinema back when it was the Elgin Fox Theater. Now, he's co-starring in a movie playing at the theater, "A Madea Family Funeral."

The Larkin High School graduate returned Saturday to screen the movie with family, friends and fans.

"I was born and raised here, so this is home for me," said Otunga, a few minutes before a meet-and-greet session in the theater's lobby. He once worked across the street at the Target on Randall Road, he said. Growing up in Elgin shaped him and "this is always home and a comfortable place," he said.

Tyler Perry's farewell film to the Madea franchise, released Friday, grossed \$27 million over the weekend, according to Hollywoodnews.com. "A Madea Family Funeral" is the 11th film featuring Perry as the outspoken, volatile matriarch. Otunga plays the character of Will, a member of Madea's extended family.

No one on the set of the film knew it would be the last one, Otunga said. "I love the franchise. I'm a fan myself, which made it really cool to be a part of it," he said. "I do believe this is the best Madea. Reading the script, I was laughing out loud. They saved the best for last.

"Tyler Perry is amazing to work with," Otunga said. "He's so unique. He's a genius at what he does. I'm the kind of person who admires anyone who is exceptionally brilliant in their craft, and he's one of those people."

Perry plays four different characters in the film, wrote the script, produced the film and directed it, Otunga said. It was amazing to watch Perry work, he said. "He's incredibly efficient. He shoots super-fast so you have to bring your 'A' game when you work with him."



- Ikie Ledbetter, of Elgin, took a photo Saturday with actor David Otunga at Marcus Elgin Cinema before watching him in "A Madea Family Funeral," the final film in Tyler Perry's Madea franchise.

Otunga graduated from Larkin in 1998. He earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Illinois and later graduated from Harvard Law School. He joined the firm of Sidley Austin after graduation, according to his biography, but left the firm in 2007 to pursue a career as a professional wrestler with the WWE. Otunga later left wrestling to focus on his acting career.

Ambria Canada is a Larkin graduate, like Otunga, and decided to attend the special screening with her mother, Louella, and her son, Jehari Freeman, 12. Mother and daughter said they are fans of the Madea movies and were excited to see the film and have a chance to meet Otunga. Jehari is a wrestling fan and knows Otunga from his WWE days, he said.

"I think the (Medea) character has been instrumental in Tyler Perry's career," Ambria Canada said. "She is funny. She has brought cultures together. Who doesn't know about her?"

Otunga visited Larkin last week to talk with students, the two women said. "He's still very much in touch with his roots," Louella Canada said.

"It was awesome," Otunga said of his visit to LHS. "I wanted to go and give (movie) tickets to the drama students and Black History Club members so they could come see someone from their high school made it and is on the big screen.

"I remember being a kid there," Otunga said. "I was shy and introverted, but I always had big dreams. I wanted to be an actor and professional wrestler. Thinking back to that kid, it's amazing how far I've come."

He is also a motivational speaker who goes to high schools and colleges, he said.

Sharlet Spann, a family friend, teaches at Larkin. The students were excited to meet him and proud to call him an alumnus, she said.

Spann remembers Otunga as an honor student who was a very good kid, she said.

"He's very down to earth. He's still the same, wonderful kid I've always known," she said.