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Opinion

## 12 on Tuesday: Shelton Evans

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Madison365

Shelton Evans



## CONTENT FROM OUR PARTNER - MADISON365

Beloit native Shelton Evans is a longtime education leader and mentoring innovator. He co-developed the Brothers Reaching Out in- and out-of-school peer support group program for middle and high school youth and is one of the four founding members of the Black Male Collaborative along with Tutankhamun "Coach" Assad, Will Green and Lamark Shackerford. He now works with UW Extension as the lead facilitator and academic support specialist for The Circles of Support Approach.

### **Rank your top five MCs.**

In no particular order: Nas, Jay Z, Biggie, Big L, KRS One

### **Which motivates you more: doubters or supporters?**

Doubters motivate me more, simply because I understand their doubt is a form of indirect admiration for whatever it is I'm trying to accomplish, the doubter may not have gotten the same chance at the same opportunity, so their support is translated through immediate doubt!!

To doubt someone, you have to literally take the time to think of that individual, find what you like about that individual, with the sole purpose to destroy their character. Truly understanding the simple concept of, "its takes more effort to hate than appreciate" validates my efforts.

### **Why do you live in Madison?**

Acquiring a recent position at UW-Extension with a weekly rotating workload that has me frequently moving from school to school, the majority of my work is done in Madison and surrounding areas, so it only made sense.

### **What three leaders in Madison under 50 have impressed you the most?**

I'm still new to the area and learning, however from the kids I've worked with, material I've read, Michael Johnson of the Boys & Girls Club has been very intentional about after school programming for the youth they serve. The dynamic programming they deliver meets the needs of not only the students but the communities in which they are located.

I've also had the pleasure of working with one of the most effective sex education instructors in my experiences. Stephanie Nash was a former employee of a grant that taught sex education to middle and high school students in which she delivered the program through Kennedy Heights Community Center located on the north side of Madison.

### **What's the biggest stumbling block in Madison to turning the corner on our racial disparities?**

Madison has the reputation from outside of being the most diverse city in the state because of the demographics. Recently moving here, I can actually see the disparities. The location of neighborhoods deemed to be populated by people of color are placed on the edges of the city, while current expansions seems to be pushing those neighborhoods further out. In my daily work, I experience and get to see some of the disparities in education firsthand. If we would begin to look at the "Achievement Gap" as the "Receivment Gap" we would realize and honor that "only those students that receive will have the opportunity that they deserve to achieve."

Lastly, another stumbling block is truly realizing, "it's difficult to solve a problem with the mind that created it," meaning until those who are affected most by disparities have a true, respected, and validated voice in the solution, in my opinion, Madison will continue to admire the problem and ignore the solution, meaning the people affected.

### **What are your top three priorities at this point in your life?**

My top three priorities currently in life are to continue to serve in my purpose of working for youth with an emphasis on young men of color to ensure they realize their true potential and to also regain their brilliance through intentional affirmation, maximizing my time productively according to my purpose to ensure continued happiness, and to always be present, appreciating "the now!"

### **You grew up in Beloit. What are two things you love about Beloit and two things you don't like about Beloit?**

Two things I love about Beloit are the constant access to family and the ability to endure life currently. I call it Beloit, Mississippi. I had the pleasure of having both sides of my family living in walking proximity of my home during my childhood. I literally take 20 steps to jump the fence to go to my grandparents house, literally cross the driveway right next door stayed my great grandparents, and on that block within four blocks to the left or right, I either had an aunt, cousins, or my other grandfather that resided on the same block. Also, I love some of the experiences that were available to me as well. What I learned watching others taught me valuable lessons of life that I will continually hold dear to my heart forever.

What I don't like about is how city resources aren't currently being strategically utilized with the intent to build purposeful sanctuary for our youth to feel a sense of usefulness and competence. Currently, I'm allowed the opportunity to sit, talk, and most importantly listen to students as humans weekly during their school day. I personally feel the emotional deprivation or their perceived notion as such is

damaging our youth in my community.

**In Janesville you did a lot of mentoring in the high schools. We all know mentoring is important. But do you feel it's important for there to be more black male mentors, if so why?**

It's certainly important for black mentors to be present in the schools. In my experiences, I've learned that me being black and culturally connecting with youth to affirm who they are culturally while in school has been beneficial to not only the student but the staff. I get the privilege to translate behaviors to culturally bridge understandings to build more effective relationships.

Too often black men aren't mirrored to students in a leadership role during their whole school experience. To see a black man in a role of advocacy for their right to be students, changes their perception of black men generally, themselves, school, future, and gives them a sense of hope and belonging. Also to provide resources to staff to empower them to feel adequate to be able to build a rapport with all students.

**Your older brother Ty Evans is something of a legend in Beloit. Was it hard growing up with such a well-known brother?**

Having a mother as we did, she always instilled individuality in us with a foundation of brotherhood. It was always interesting to see how others would look up to him in ways that I didn't. He made it easy to be me and to this day he's intentional about validating who I am as an individual and not his little brother. I can say Ty has been my "father in a brother" throughout my life. I'll never compare myself to him because it's no comparison, however I'll always stay motivated to, as we say to each other to this day, "meet you at the top!!"

**People who knew your mom always talk about her faith. Has faith played a major role in your life?**

My mother's faith is the reason I currently attend church regularly, pray daily, and will forever honor my spirituality. Faith has gotten me where I am now and where I'm going. Faith is my only constant mode of transportation on my current ride within my purpose. My mother practiced faith in our everyday lives at a very young age. More importantly she taught my brother and I how it worked through obstacles throughout her life with clear explanations of reason. My mothers faith is what lives in me and I thank God daily for just that.

**New Jack City or American Gangster?**

American Gangster

**LeBron James or Kobe Bryant, and why?**

Kobe Bryant.....you can't teach his drive and the way his heart is set up. Failure isn't an option for him. His overall approach and perceived arrogance is the quiet confidence that most will never understand until they understand what it is they're on this very earth for, purpose driven!!



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