

183D WING NEWS



183D Wing, Illinois Air National Guard, 3101 J. David Jones Parkway, Springfield, IL, 62707

Leadership development and team building expert, Stephon Williams, brought his enthusiastic message of diversity and inclusion to the 183d yesterday. Williams is an engaging speaker, who creates an atmosphere of inclusion and open dialogue within his audience. This was noticeable from the start, as he personally greeted and shook hands with each person as they entered the room prior to his presentation.

Williams' presentation began with a brief history lesson on Martin Luther King Jr. and Black History Month, citing the innovations of George Washington Carver, Thomas Mensah, George Alcorn, Garrett Morgan, Lewis Latimer, and Charles Drew, and how their accomplishments helped shape our lives and the world we live in today. Additionally, he touched on the role of the National Guard in the aftermath of the landmark Supreme Court case, Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, KS, where civil unrest and rioting occurred when the desegregation of schools was being enforced.

Through an amusing exercise linking pairs of members together with rope, the members had to share with learn about each other, in order to free themselves; the message being communication, knowledge, and partnership. Opening lines of communication leads to knowledge, which then can lead to inclusion, acceptance, and partnership. All of these things lead to more effective leadership and have a greater effect on mission accomplishment.

Unconscious bias and racial stereotypes are perhaps the greatest barriers to open and effective communication. In an exercise aimed at breaking down those barriers, Williams said, "the best way to combat these barriers, is not to act on them".

"Why is this type of training important?" Williams asked. "If members feel accepted and included, they will strive to do more, and be the best they can be." If a person feels valuable, they will want to continue to improve and stay where they feel like part of a team, making their work environment a better place. In the military, this can be tied directly to effective recruiting and retention. "We are leading people, not machines", said Williams.

