

# NEW YORK Amsterdam News

Vol. 100 No. 31 July 29-August 4, 2010  
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The new Black view  
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\$1.00 New York City

## Nightlife

(Dave Goodson photo)

# Ginuwine: A real dude with love in his heart

By DAVE GOODSON

"To whom much is given, much is expected," goes the adage. A concept that is simple in theory yet complex in execution.

If you were to add in the "celebrity" factor, the equation can become a little more clouded. Then your rationale comes to the forefront, as it should. Thousands of times we've seen someone get into trouble, followed by a check presentation/photo opportunity, a few radio/TV public service announcements and, as time passes, the interest wanes.

Thankfully, there are occasions where a person finds an issue that he identifies with and his or her intentions are, well, Ginuwine. Don't get thrown off by the spelling.

At a recent appearance in Harlem, it was proven that genuine and Ginuwine are synonymous. He, born Elgin Lumpkin, is a REAL

dude. Says the entertainer, "A lot of people in the business don't have your best interest at heart. They're in it for the money and to use you as much as they can. I can't judge anybody. That's something they're going through or that could just be the way they are."

"I believe that if you're going to walk down that road, you should also do something to try to enhance that road and that's what I am, with my wife, trying to do. You can't just take, take, take. You have to give, give, give. I'm not rich by any means, but if I can spare anything, especially my time and wisdom of the situation, I'm going to do that."

The road Ginuwine is trying to enhance is one that has plagued the African-American community for years: mental illness. Through his charitable organization that he founded, SPRUCE (Special People Requiring Unique Care Equally), Ginuwine has taken a hands-on approach to demonstrate the organization's mission to help enhance normalcy in the everyday

lives of deserving individuals with mental and physical challenges—challenges that he himself faces.

Five short years ago, Ginuwine struggled with suicidal tendencies along with a drug addiction after his father committed suicide and his mother died of cancer within the same year. He now hopes that the story of his own recovery can help others going through the struggles of depression and mental health issues strive and become positive members of society.

Ginuwine states: "This opportunity is something that I have been looking forward to. The only way to make a positive situation out of a negative one is to try to share your

intimate setting and was appreciated by all involved.

A graduate of the course revealed, "There were no big Us and little Us in that room. I didn't come here to say I saw Ginuwine. I wanted to hear what he had to say and gauge how it could affect and impact the community.

"Also, when he finished his piece, he didn't separate himself from the people. He ate, shook hands and personally spoke with everyone after. What he did today showed me a lot."

Dwayne Mayes, director of the HTH Center at Community Access, was impressed as well with the honest approach and sincerity. "He spoke from his heart, not from a press release or a prepared speech. It was something he identified with and it showed in the way he imparted that passion.

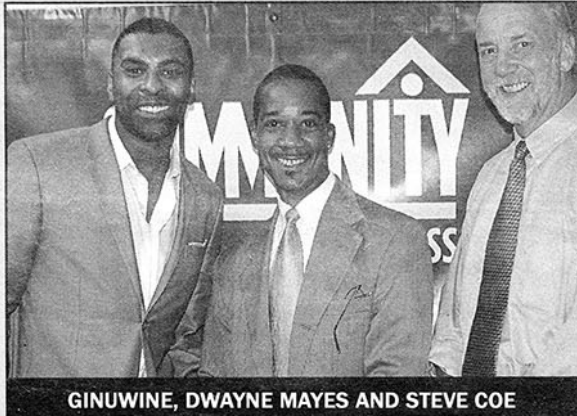
"We've been taught that [a psychiatric disability is] a character defect and the worst thing possible. You can be addicted to drugs, homeless, a felon—anything except crazy. So to have someone with

the status of Ginuwine come out and share his challenges and struggles with a psychiatric disability is a tremendous help in combating that fear and stigma. As more celebrities come forward with that courage, we'll be able to put a human face on this condition."

Steve Coe, chief executive officer at Community Access, shares the same hope. "The fact that he can bring out entertainers and athletes—hopefully he can help us hold an event where graduates of our program and others can come to and get the message that mental illness is something that you can recover from and thrive.

"People don't view our clientele as people, but you can be working with people side by side in some important jobs and not realize someone is dealing with mental illness. Somebody like Ginuwine can help in changing that perception."

Good job, brother. I'm out. Holla next week. 'Til then, enjoy the nightlife.



GINUWINE, DWAYNE MAYES AND STEVE COE

experience with others who are going through the same thing. If I help direct one person's life in the right direction, then I will feel truly accomplished and blessed."

To share the message, Ginuwine searched for a government with which to partner and was referred to Community Access. For those unfamiliar, as I was, here we go: For 36 years, Community Access has created opportunities for New Yorkers living with mental illness to gain access to housing, job training, mentoring and counseling programs that empower them to transition from shelters and institutions to independent living.

At the Community Access Howie the Harp Peer Advocacy and Training Center—an award-winning job training center in Harlem dedicated to helping people with psychiatric disabilities overcome preconceptions, reach their potential and thrive as active members of the community—Ginuwine spoke to participants of the program in an