



FASHION

Creatives Want Change To Encourage Black Students

- The organization will support high school students who want to pursue a career in the industry.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

Joe's Blackbook has long championed scholarships for students pursuing careers in fashion through its annual design competition where two juniors studying either men's or women's wear are chosen each year to receive \$10,000 to be used to further their education.

But founder Joe Medved noticed the low enrollment of Black college students in U.S. fashion programs and is setting out to change that.

Medved has teamed with Randy Cousin, senior vice president of product concept and The People's Place Program for Tommy Hilfiger, and Matthew Kane, men's and women's design manager for Club Monaco,

to create Creatives Want Change. The goal of the organization is to help cultivate a pipeline of Black creative talent beginning at the high school level.

The idea for the organization started taking shape in June with Cousin, who is Black and grew up in inner-city Youngstown, Ohio, pointing out that many underserved communities lack awareness of the fashion and retail industry, resources to learn about it, and the opportunities it provides. After brainstorming with Medved, a veteran recruiter who has run the Joe's Blackbook Scholarship competition for more than 10 years, and Kane, they founded CWC.

"The strategic support of young Black creative talent in fashion is long overdue," Cousin said. "In order for organizations to exhibit the diverse change we want to see in the fashion industry, we needed a platform to cultivate the fusion of Black creatives with opportunities that exist but are not widely known outside certain circles. That platform

is Creatives Want Change. CWC will incubate high school level talent, offering support and guidance as they progress through the career pipeline. The support begins by linking Black talent with established pre-college programs to unleash their creative genius. This development will bring us one step closer to increased representation of Black creatives in our industry."

"Few Black senior and executive-level leaders exist in fashion and retail," Medved said. "This problem means that critical voices go unheard. One lever for change is to raise awareness, interest and opportunity within the Black community early in the educational pipeline. The industry must do a better job of engaging actively with Black youths at the high school level, to not only promote curiosity about the opportunities in the industry, but also to provide support in realizing viable career paths."

Kane added that "fostering design talent has to happen at the earliest stages, and we have to make sure that young

Black designers have access to the best preparation for their undergraduate education. We looked to other programs like Prep for Prep, whose goal is to ensure students enter college on a more level playing field on Day One, and their model was instructive. The mission of CWC is to sponsor these early opportunities and to ensure that a more diverse audience knows that a career in fashion is for them. Our industry sorely needs their vision."

Creatives Want Change will fund pre-college educational opportunities by recruiting young Black design talent for pre-college summer fellowship programs at top fashion schools nationwide including the Fashion Institute of Technology, California College of the Arts, Otis College of Art and Design, Academy of Art University, Rhode Island School of Design and others.

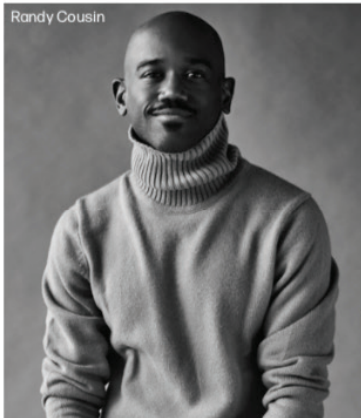
In addition, students will be offered mentorship opportunities with industry professionals including Marcus LeBlanc, global creative design director for The North Face; Kiana Foster, vice president of merchandising for Spanx; Ernest Adams, senior vice president of talent for Ralph Lauren; Keisha Golding, senior director of global talent acquisition for Gap; Maxwell Osborne, cofounder of Public School, and Abdul Abasi, cofounder of Abasi-Rosborough.

Students will be awarded college scholarships, internships and apprenticeships, community outreach and exposure, the organization said.

LeBlanc, who also serves as an advocate for CWC, was a resident adviser at Otis in the early Aughts and "saw the positive impact that exposure to higher education had on the students. These programs are expensive and there is a likelihood that Black students aren't even aware of their existence. I'm proud to share my voice and my story to help Joe and Matty, both of whom I've known for many years, with their powerful new project. The fashion industry, design in particular, has an unfortunate under-representation of Black voices and I believe this is a smart way to work toward positive change."

The organization is expected to launch this week.

Randy Cousin



Joe Medved



Matthew Kane

