

## Byron Embry to speak at NJC Thursday, Jan. 28

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Students who have heard him speak in other venues describe him as “unforgettable,” “powerful,” “dramatic” and amazing.” On Thursday, Jan. 28, this one time professional baseball player, now an inspirational speaker, Byron Embry, will be in Sterling on the campus of Northeastern Junior College.

He will be presenting his “Slamming the Door on Self-Doubt” talk to NJC students and members of the public. His appearance, sponsored by the Associated Student Government as part of the college’s observation of Black History Month, will be at 7 p.m. in Corsberg Theatre in E.S. French Hall.

Like any kid born with a handicap, Embry wanted to be considered normal by his friends at school and in his neighborhood. However, anytime he uttered a word, his horrendous speech impediment made him stick out of the crowd. After one of the most humiliating moments in his life, he knew he needed help.

“I wanted to be a TV weatherman more than anything on earth. My high school science teacher brought in my favorite TV weatherman to speak. It was about to be the most exciting day of my life. After telling him I wanted to be a meteorologist, the unthinkable happened. A kid stood up and said, ‘You will never be a weatherman. By the time you spit the words out that a tornado is coming, it would have already hit and killed 50 people!’ The class burst into laughter and I almost broke into tears,” says Embry.

Some people would have taken the humiliation to heart and let it break them, but not Embry. It brought out his drive to be well spoken and conquer his limitations.

Working diligently with a speech pathologist paid off one night when a miracle occurred. Embry found his voice when asked to give the closing remarks to a church youth group. The audience of 50 were stunned at what they heard, “His voice shook the ground,” says Pastor B.J. Parks.

Embry began speaking to groups about his life as a professional pitcher in the major leagues and kept students and professors of Indian Hills Community College on the edge of their seats when he gave his presentations.

Growing up as a young man in Richmond, Ky. did not come easy for Embry. The product of a single-parent home, his mother Judy did her very best to provide for her two young children. However, her best proved not to be enough as finances proved to be a thorn in the side of the Embry family.

After being evicted from every apartment they ever lived in, the family was forced to live with Embry's grandmother in a tiny one-bedroom apartment where he slept on the floor next to the bathroom.

With no male role model, as was common in his community, Embry struggled with his identity as he grew into manhood. At risk of being caught in the vicious cycle of drugs and gang violence, Embry knew he had to work his way out of the system somehow. As it turned out, his high power 96 m.p.h. fastball did the trick.

Embry was drafted and signed by the Atlanta Braves at age 19 (1997) and his career took off like a rocket in his first season with the Braves' Rookie League affiliate, the Danville Braves.

He kept his eye on the ball and ended up being signed with the Kansas City Royals and Seattle Mariners, where he spent two seasons. He has spent 12 years playing baseball professionally.

Embry now owns and operates a company called Closing Remarks, headquartered in Colorado Springs. He speaks all over the country, encouraging people to live their dreams. His personal mission is to impact, encourage, inspire and empower individuals to be who they desire to be.

Members of the public are invited to attend, however due to some of the language content of his presentation, the show is not recommended for those who are under 14 years of age.

“As a closer in baseball (the pitcher at the end of the game that ‘slams the door’ on the opposition), I know the feeling of pressure and anxiety all too well,” says Embry. “I now use this experience to discuss overcoming obstacles in your life—‘slamming the door on them.’”

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