

Floyd Henderson: Breaking barriers

Written by Abeni Hill

Monday, 13 January 2014 16:17



Northside resident and retired research librarian Floyd Henderson was inducted into Valparaiso University's Hall of Fame last year in February as the first African-American inductee.

Henderson made history for the first time when he gained the title of first African-American to participate in intercollegiate athletics at Valparaiso University in 1951. The barrier breaker said that he first heard about the Lutheran university from his hometown minister.

"In Oklahoma, I attended a Lutheran church and the minister was interested in my high school's athletics," said Henderson. The minister's name was Karl Lutze. Lutze was a white minister with an African American congregation.

Lutze asked Henderson about his interest in earning a football scholarship to Valparaiso. "He told me this was a chance to make a little history. I would be the first black to make the team," said Henderson.

The retired football star said he looked forward to the challenge of attending Valparaiso and getting involved in sports.

"I wasn't intimidated. I had a lot of confidence in my academic ability," said Henderson. "Only thing I thought about was the social life." He said there were about eight other African-American students at Valparaiso at his time of attendance.

Henderson said he met his wife at the university.

The Oklahoma native said he moved to Minneapolis to earn his Master's degree at the University of Minnesota. After earning a degree in Library and Information Science, Henderson served as the Librarian at the U of M for seven years.

Henderson advises to aspiring athletes who are looking to play sports in college to focus on education. "Let your main purpose be to get a degree," said Henderson. "Athletics will only last so long, but the rest of your life will depend on what you learned in college