It started with a tie.

Larry Pye Jr. had first noticed the tie in middle school: red with two black handprints, one larger than the other. It was always paired with a white shirt and black pants.
“I was intrigued,” Pye, now 17, said.

He soon learned the tie was the uniform of the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project, a mentor program for male minority students at several schools throughout Miami-Dade County. He then applied to join the program as a ninth grade student at Miami Northwestern Senior High School.

Four years later, Pye wore his own red tie June 2 as he accepted a scholarship to Florida A&M University during the organization’s Academic Signing Night at Jungle Island. More than $500,000 in scholarship money was awarded to 84 graduating high school seniors during the ceremony.

“It shows that hard work pays off,” Pye said. “It takes some burdens off my family.”

The program was started by U.S. Congresswoman Frederica Wilson in 1993 to help at-risk male youth stay in school. Students apply to be a part of the program at over 100 elementary, middle and high schools in Miami-Dade County, and are each paired with a mentor from the community for meetings and field trips.

Each year, Wilson said, the scholarship night is a bittersweet moment for her.

“I’m presenting them with scholarships, with laptop computers,” Wilson said. “But I am also presenting them to the world — a world that’s full of challenges for boys that look like them.”

Tuesday, the boys looked like accomplished men, beaming proudly as they signed scholarship letters and shook hands with university representatives and their mentors. They wore their red ties and custom-made suits donated by the Sean John Men’s Clothing Collection at Macy’s.

For many of the boys, it was the first suit they had owned.

“Looking at these beautiful black men in these beautiful black suits, I think they can do anything,” Sean John President Jeffrey Tweedy said to the audience of students, parents and mentors. “So let’s encourage them.”

“There’s nothing holding you back.”

Tweedy was inducted as a role model in the program Tuesday along with Fisk University President H. James Williams and other community members.
As their names were called, each student signed a scholarship acceptance letter and donned a hat from their university. Grinning, they high fived each other and shook hands as they returned to their seats.

Barbara Olano fought back tears as she took pictures of her son, Brandon Hernandez, 18, signing his letter for a scholarship to the Department of Fire Rescue Training Center.

“I’m a single mom, so I figured the male role model would really help him,” she said. “He has become a mature, intellectual man. I’m ecstatic.”

The ceremony concluded with a rendition of Yolanda Adams’s “What About the Children” before recipients each received a laptop and a copy of *Reach: 40 Black Men Speak on Living, Leading, and Succeeding*, a collection of personal essays edited by Ben Jealous and Trabian Shorters.

For Pye, the suit and tie will serve as the biggest memory of the brotherhood he found in the program.

“We’re all connected,” he said. “Not by blood, but by ties.”

WHERE THEY ARE GOING

**Art Center College of Design Art School**
Emanuel A. De Martinez
Sean Herrin

**Barry University**
Necen T. Dinkins

**Bethune Cookman University**
Darquavise D. Dixon
Deavon Gooden

**College for Creative Studies**
De’Naric Mikle

**Culinary Institute of Arts**
Heisson Q. Chimbi
Department of Fire Rescue Training Center
Derrick Alcime
Gabyson Cadestin
Brandon Hernandez
Justin Miller
Brenton Roberts
Fisk University
Moises Arzu

Florida Gulf Coast University
Jordan A. Neal

Florida International University
Nathaniel Best
Malik Brown
Bedrice Charles
Alex Desiral
Price Destinobles
Christopher Excellent
Makaveli Gibson
Kevin Jose Hernandez
Mike Luscar
Serge Metellus
Andy M. Moreira
Guy R. Paul
Kenny Pierre
Joshua Stephenson
Dwayne Thomas

**Florida A&M University**

Dwayne Flanders
Samuel Fortune
JacQuez Garrison
Aaron Hanna
Terry L. Jefferson
Larry D. Pye, Jr.
Robert Ratliff
Wayne R. Sanders
Clifford Kyle Stephens
Garrett Tolbert
Quandell Torrence

**Florida Memorial University**

Malik Fleming

**Florida State University**

Madiba McKenzie
Bryan Pena

Jacksonville University

Derrick Lamar Jackson

**Miami International University of Arts & Design**

Ariel A. Gurdian

**Miami Dade College**

Alan L. Aldao
Samuel Antoine
Frantz Augustin
David Benjamin
Leonaldo Bribiescas
Max J. Brutus
Jerry Cadet
Ramdin Constantine
Reynaldo DelValle
Richard Duroseau
Benjamin Ferreiro
Giovanni Gaspard
Alexis Gonzalez
Cristian E. Guillen
Steve L. Jean-Pierre
Sergio Jiron
Khaleel Joly
Max Lopez
Emmanuel F. Manon
Alan R. Odom
Mateo Piedrahita
Jarrett Ramsey
Carlos Rodriguez
Rico T. Rozier
Devin Spencer
Alejandro Terrero
Joshua Vildor
Franklin and Marshall College
Raphael Y. Louis

Milwaukee Institute Art Design
Julien Roberson
Shomari Slaton

School of Visual Arts (Film Making)
Terry Gifford

St. Thomas University
Levarence L. Gilliard

Tallahassee Community College
Michelir Senatus

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Jontavis Testa

University of Central Florida
Eldrick M. Clapp

University of Florida
Dwayne Robinson
Erickben Elizaire

University of South Florida
Jeffrey Phillipe
Bryce Senatus

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