



Dr. Melvin Pender, Jr. Biography

"To whom much is given, much is required." Mel Pender has spent many years making this motto a part of his lifestyle by giving back to his community. A native of Atlanta, a retired military officer, Olympian, entrepreneur, and community leader Mel has made numerous contributions to his community. The construction of the first black pool in Lynwood Park the community, where he grew up, was one of his first contributions; however motivating youth is his passion and most significant contribution. His professional and life experiences provide the support from which he drafts his message when addressing young audiences. His aim is to inspire and motivate youth to achieve their goals and to remember that once success is achieved they must reach back and help another child succeed.

Entering the U.S. Army at the age of 17 as an enlisted man he served 11 years then attended Officers Candidate School where he became an officer. He served in the 9 Division, the Central Intelligence Agency and as a commanding officer in the 82nd Airborne Division. Capt. Pender was assigned two tours in Vietnam and after serving 21 years in the military he retired in 1976. Among numerous medals and badges the most distinguished awards were the Bronze Star, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Combat Infantry badge, the Meritorious Service Medal and the Joint Service commendation Medal.

At age 25 while playing football on the Army team he discovered his natural talent was track and field. His career as a world-class athlete began while still maintaining his position in the military. To date, Mel holds the World Record in the 50 and 60 yard dash. He once held World Records in the 70 and 100-yard dash and the 100-meter dash. In 1964, at the age of 27, he competed in the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. Mel was pulled out of combat in Vietnam to compete in the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City where he won the gold medal in the 4x100-meter relay (at 31, he was the oldest sprinter to compete in the 100 meters relay). He was pulled again from Vietnam for the 1972 Olympic trials, injuring himself, he didn't make the team. Following his Olympic endeavor, Mel was offered several professional football contracts but turned them down to continue his military career.

From 1970-76 he served his last six years at West Point Military Academy as the first black coach of track & field. During 1972 to 1975, while coaching at West Point, Mel worked very hard to complete his education, traveling over 100 miles daily to Adelphi University. In 1976 Mel earned a BA degree in Social Science with honors and ran professional track for the International Track Association concurrently. He set the world record in the 60 yard dash at the age of 35 years old at the time of 5.8 seconds and was given distinction by becoming All American 3 times.

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After a successful career in sports administration and management, Mel formed his own company, Metro Industries Group in 1978, a consulting organization as well as The Great American Water, Inc. which he later sold. During 1979- 1990's Mel worked for the National Association of Homebuilders as the national coordinator for the Manpower training program of Job Corps. Under his leadership, the Manpower Training Development Division placed first out of six regions, for seven years, in training and placement of job corps members. In 1991 Mel received the highest leadership award "Hands-On Award" for training and job placement of at-risk youth.

In 1990-1996 as director of community affairs for the Atlanta Hawks and president of the Atlanta Hawks Foundation, Mel maintained the organization's visibility in the community, while working with government agencies on community programs. He was the Hawks representative at community functions, and coordinated special events and fundraising activities. Mel also worked as the athletic administrator for the NFL Players Association youth development program.

In 1995 he founded The Gathering of Eagles Foundation and took on the mission to "Teach a child how to sew into the fabric of the future." He promotes annual golf tournaments, auctions, and various other special events to raise funds to provide scholarships for young women and men who aspire to go to college.

Dr. Pender served on the board of directors of the United States Sports Academy, the Sickle Cell Foundation, the Inner City Games, and the Hank Aaron Rookie League. His past board memberships include Southwest Hospital, the Atlanta Chapter of the United Way, Policy Advisory board Of the Atlanta Project and also served as the Vice-President of the USA Track and Field Association of Georgia in 2001. Always committed to children; he supports the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and has served on the Special Olympics Committee in Georgia. In addition Mel was an active member of the 100 Black Men Club of DeKalb County

In 2001 Mel initiated and coordinated one of Georgia's largest Youth Games Track and Field Invitational Championships held in DeKalb County, providing top quality amateur competition and promoting physical fitness with personal health training to children ages 7-18. Through the years he has also coordinated summer camps in track and field skills.

Mel and wife Rev. Debbie Pender have co-authored "Expression of Hope: The Mel Pender Story" his autobiography that speaks of overcoming and persevering. Together they have formed M&D Consulting Firm which provides the service of motivational speaking to institutions and young leaders of tomorrow with an inspirational message that "Dreams Can Come True".

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Mel's accomplishments include the following:

- 1964 and 1968 All American Amateur Athletic Union Award
- 1966 United States Army Infantry Officers School
- 1981 member of Georgia's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- 1982 appointed by Gov. George Busbee to the Jail/Prison Overcrowding Committee
- 1984 & 1985 100% Wrong Club Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1984 Georgia State Sport Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1985 Louisiana Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1994 recognized by *Dollars and Sense* magazine as one of the best and brightest business and professional men
- 1995 US Dept. of Justice Bureau of Investigations / FBI Community Leadership Award
- 1996 Adelphi University Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1995 Awarded the Mel Pender Day by the Mayor of Atlanta (Maynard Jackson)
- 1995 & 96 Southern Bell Calendar Spirit Legends Award
- 1996 Atlanta Committee for the Youth Advisory Council US Olympic Games
- 1996 Bellsouth *Spirit of Legends* Hall of Fame Inductee
- 1997 Doctoral Degree from Adelphi University
- 1998 graduated from Leadership Atlanta
- 2001 Bob Hayes Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2006 appointed to the United States Olympic Alumni Board
- 2007 Awarded Mel Pender Day by Vernon Jones CEO of Dekalb Co. Georgia
- 2002 to Present United States Sports Academy
- 2012 Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2014 Smyrna Community Steering Committee
- Current: Author of "*Expression of Hope: The Mel Pender Story*"
- 2015 United States Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2015 Georgia Military Veterans' Hall of Fame Inductee
- 2015 Campaign Chairman for Mayor of Smyrna, GA
- 2017 Leading Age Icon Awardee
- 2018 Legendary Awards Honoree