

KIDS GET FORMAL DINING EXPERIENCE

BY LAYLA GARMS
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University student leaders shared a meal and tips for future success with fourth-graders at Ashley IB Magnet Elementary last week.

The program – which included an etiquette lesson before the three-course meal was served – was part of the university's ongoing effort to build bridges in the community, according to RaVonda Dalton-Rann, executive assistant to WSSU's chancellor.

Aramark, which is charged with providing dining services at WSSU, provided the meal. WSSU Rams like Jarius Miles, a sophomore psychology major and member of the Campus Activities Board, provided examples of student success and guided the table talk.

"I like younger kids and helping them grow in life," Miles, 19, gave as his motivation for volunteering for the program.

The Henderson native shared a table with six youngsters. Miles believes the decorum tips he helped to impart will serve the kids well.

"You always want to have some style and class about yourself," he said. "I think that's important."

Dontia "Tia" Barrett, WSSU's Miss Sophomore, said she jumped at the chance to take part.

"I love to give back," said Barrett, the junior class president-elect. "I love community service, and when they told me about this opportunity to help out, I was really excited because I love kids as well."

Having volunteered at the Boys & Girls Club in her native Durham, Barrett was right at home with the children, many of whom stopped to hug her before leaving the dinner. Barrett said she is hopeful she will get another opportunity to work with the students at Ashley.

"I really love the environment, just being with the kids and getting to teach them things and practice being a role model for them," she related. "It felt good."

Board of Education Member Victor "Vic" Johnson was among the invited guests who attended the dinner, which was held in the school's music room. Johnson is also a WSSU Trustee. He worked alongside Dalton-Rann to help establish the partnership with Ashley Principal Mark Hairston, who took the helm at the predominantly black and brown school at the start of the 2013-14 school year.

"I'm impressed," Johnson, a WSSU alumnus, said about the gathering. "... We needed to reach back."



Jarius Miles with Ashley students (clockwise, from left, Melanye Arellates, Betzy Leon, McKenna Jones, Ronald Sanders, Erik Bernal and Itzel Cisneros.



(Above) Dontia "Tia" Barrett with (from left) Malaysia Owens, Nazosheona Nichols, Ayana Butts and Aniyah Wright.



(Left) RaVonda Dalton-Rann with Board of Education Member Vic Johnson (left) and Principal Mark Hairston.

Hairston said the presence of WSSU students and officials at Ashley sends a positive message to his students.

"I think activities like this show our children that people care – the community cares, the universities care – and this is evidence of that right here," he stated. "To me, it's all about relationships, connecting our children to see what they can do."

Ashley also partners with Wake Forest University, which provides support for the school's Saturday Explorers Academy.

Hairston said the partnerships are part of a concerted effort he is making to expand his students' horizons and broaden the school's support network.

"I think kids in this community and the community as a whole are going to know that universities like WSSU and Wake Forest, they are a part of the futures of these children, so they won't be strangers in this building. They won't be strangers in this community, they won't be strangers to our children," he said, adding that he hopes some of his students will someday matriculate to the two universities.

Oakes

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"It's actually been more than what I expected, just receiving praise and recognition in places that I never imagined," she related. "I can go out of town and people will recognize me from seeing my picture."

Oakes enjoys informal mentoring relationships with several high school students outside the city, some of whom are now considering attending WSSU as



WSSU Photo by Garrett Garms
Vanity Oakes holds her crown.

a result of her guidance. She has also been involved in several local initiatives, addressing youth in a variety of programs. She is even slated to return to Mineral Springs Elementary, where she attended as a girl, to deliver the commencement speech at its upcoming fifth grade graduation.

"That's been the best feeling that I ever felt in my life, how I can have an impact on somebody's life without ever meeting them," she said. "... I just want to be a positive voice, someone that they can talk to."

Oakes says she is humbled by the admiration and support she has been afforded as Miss WSSU. She is hopeful that her family of alumni, fellow students and community supporters will come together one more time and cast their votes to help her win the Miss HBCU crown.

"This will bring national recognition to not just our institution but our city as well," she noted. "I would just love to represent our city and our institution to the fullest extent. I just want to do as much as I can to represent the best I can."

Royal Court Advisor Orlando Mitchell said Oakes has done a "remarkable" job of representing the university.

Mitchell, who holds a place in his alma mater's history as the first-ever Mr. Livingstone College, believes Oakes has what it takes to win the coveted Ebony HBCU Queens cover.

"I think Ebony would benefit by having Vanity as their face," he said. "

Voting for the Ebony HBCU Campus Queens Contest is open now. Oakes' bio and promotional video can be found at www.ebony.com/campusqueens/153.



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