

Mentoring program makes debut in W-S

Nonprofit program LEAD Girls NC looks to expand services to young girls in Forsyth County

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Last weekend LEAD Girls NC (Leading Everyday, Accomplishing Dreams), a non-profit mentoring program for young girls, officially launched in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. Already serving girls in Guilford County, LEAD Girls NC is dedicated to providing the tools and resources that low-income or at-risk pre-teen girls must have to become productive adults and active leaders in their communities. According to founder Joy Nelson-Thomas, the program uses an evidence-based curriculum that encourages girls to achieve greatness academically, emotionally and creatively. The curriculum focuses on four core values: awareness, perspective, leadership and communication.

Although LEAD Girls is fairly new to the mentoring scene here in Winston-Salem, Nelson-Thomas has years of experience

as a mentor and knows the responsibility that comes with it as well. While studying to obtain her bachelor's degree at Salem College, Nelson-Thomas took the daughter of a family friend into her own home, without any assistance from the government, and raised her as her own.

Although she admits at times it was hard, Nelson-Thomas said after encouraging the teen to go to college, she knew she had found her calling.

"I've always had a passion for helping people," she said. "After raising a family friend for about seven years and seeing the hope I gave her, I realized that this was what I wanted to do."

"I'm a strong believer that you can do anything if you have that support system and I wanted to create that support system."

Nelson-Thomas said, after starting out slow, doors began to open up for LEAD Girls and she was able to form a partnership with Guilford County Schools.

Since making the connection last November, LEAD Girls has partnered with local organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to take girls off their waiting lists. The organization has also partnered with Community One Bank to open free bank accounts, and The Center for Smart Financial Choices, who will do a program with the girls.

During a sit down with *The Chronicle* last week, Nelson-Thomas noted although

the program focuses on girls who are considered at risk, the lessons provided through the mentoring program are tools young people from all backgrounds need to be successful.



Submitted photo
Thomas

"This program is all about creating leaders and making sure young kids have hope. Every kid is really at risk, even the ones who have access to money," she said. "I feel like every girl can benefit from this program."

While responsible for most of the legwork needed to turn the dream of LEAD Girls into reality, Nelson-Thomas said the organization's board of directors plays a major role in the success of the program as well. Nelson-Thomas said the board of directors is filled with community activists who share the same passion for improving the community and the lives of young people.

"We are here to help girls through life and all the curves, turns and bumps they may encounter. We are here to mold them through it all," she said.

Members of the board of directors include assistant professor and coordinator of criminal studies at Salem College, Dr.

Kimya Dennis; Salem College professor Jane Gillan Marrow; Salem College Chair of the art history and design department, Dr. Rosa Otero; High Point University director of Corporate Foundation and Community Support, Renee Taylor; Salem College executive assistant for the vice president of institutional advancement, Melissa L. Wilson; and award-winning author Jennifer Acosta.

"This group of women is passionate about making an impact in this community," continued Nelson-Thomas. "It's so important to surround yourself with people who are honest and are willing to work."

"As a grass roots organization, we need prominent women that believe in the mission, an that's what we have at LEAD Girls NC."

In the future, Nelson-Thomas will be looking to expand the program into other counties including Rockingham, Surry and other surrounding areas. During the meet-and-greet event held on Saturday, Aug. 13, inside the Emberson Fine Arts Center on the campus of Salem College, more than a dozen young girls registered for the upcoming fall semester.

As of Monday, Aug. 15, four spots were still available. For more information on LEAD Girls NC or to register for an upcoming session, visit www.leadgirls.org.

Summer with Shakespeare

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

More than a dozen young people spent Friday afternoon performing their own hip-hop infused rendition of "Electra," a Greek tragedy written by Sophocles.

Set a few years after the Trojan War, the tale of Electra is one of vengeance.

After the death of their father, Agamemnon, at the hands of her mother, Electra and her brother Orestes seek revenge on their mother, Clytemnestra, and stepfather, Aegisthus, for the murder.

The spinoff of the Greek tragedy performed by young performers last week was set in Haiti to match the paintings inspired by the small country in Central Anatolia, hanging inside the Delta Fine Arts Center. The performance wrapped up a unique three-week summer enrichment program that encourages students to express themselves by learning and performing classical plays.

While most students elect for summer camps that are centered around outdoor activities like sports or nights around a

camp fire, middle schoolers Lanni Jayne, Allen Wolcott and Dulce Sole Hernandez spent the last three weeks reading various works by Shakespeare and other authors, interpreting various pieces of art and readings. Not to mention, getting acting tips to use on stage from professional actors.

Sixth grader at Paisley Magnet School Lanni Jayne said preparing for the lead role of Electra called for a lot of extra work. She said preparing for opening night helped her learn how to manage her time and to be confident.

"Although I was nervous at first, after I got to know my lines I started to become more confident in myself," said Jayne. "Being confident on stage is like being confident in life."

Allen Wolcott, an eighth grader at Paisley said although it was challenging, the camp was fun at the same time. Wolcott, who also attended the camp last year, said the main thing he took away from this year's experience was the importance of teamwork.

"I came back because I enjoyed it so much last year," he continued. "It

really is something fun to do," Wolcott said.

"Anyone who is looking for something to do in the summer that's fun and a challenge at the same time, this camp is for you," he said. "I promise you won't regret it."

Eighth grader at Flat Rock Middle School Dulce Hernandez said although it was her first time performing, after working with camp co-founders and professional actors Laiona Michelle and Shuwanda Nzikou-Ilagole, she is thinking about joining the drama club when she goes to high school next year.

Shakers Performing Arts Camp teaches Shakespeare and classical theatre through music, dance, and textural interpretation. The camp, which is supported by the Reynolds American Foundation, also promotes reading and presentation skills, creativity, self-confidence, and teamwork.

Following the performance that brought the audience to their feet, Michelle said the foundation of the enrichment was built over 15 years ago in New York where she lives, with a goal to introduce children in the inner city to classical art and to create productive

people who can contribute to their communities.

"In theatre you have three major things: You have your goal, you have your tactic, and your obstacle and we feel like that is life. These are skills they will use every day," continued Michelle. "We're not trying to create the next celebrity, but what we are trying to create is responsible citizens and I think we can do that through the arts."

Nzikou-Ilagole, who serves as the camp's artistic director, said, "We teach

them that success is when opportunity meets preparation."

"When they walk away from this piece of art, they are in fact creators. These young people will be able to return to their English class and be able to engage in conversations," she said.

Drama instructor and city native Brandon Johnson, a graduate of Pace University Actors Studio School of Drama in New York, helped with the camp as well. Johnson said he was impressed after seeing the students perform.

"They came around and really got it together in no time," he said. "They are at that age where their creativity flows and it's actually amazing to watch them at that age because it's total honesty."

Shakers Performance Arts Camp is offered to children ages 6-17. The three-week camp costs \$60. For more information or to register in the future, contact Delta Fine Arts Executive Director Nadiyah Quander at the center.

Educator Warehouse continues to give supplies to teachers

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

As any teacher knows, students aren't the only ones in need of school supplies. Teachers do, too, and that's something that The Educator Warehouse is trying to help with.

The Educator Warehouse is filled with free supplies Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools teachers can get four times a year. Supplies include both school necessities for children who forgot their supplies or simply couldn't afford them, and supplies the teachers themselves will use.

Teachers schedule appointments online to come by the Warehouse, which is located in a 16-room pod at Diggs-Latham Elementary School, to "spend" the 25 points they get each quarter on items. Teachers get an average of \$100 to \$150 of supplies a quarter. Nationally, teachers spend \$500 to \$800 on school supplies a year, so the Warehouse can be a huge help.

"The school system doesn't supply teacher's school supplies; parents and PTAs do," said Karel

Chandler, one of the founding members of the Warehouse, which is a partnership between the school system, Forsyth Education Partnership and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County PTA. "We have to take care of our kids: They're our future. We want every child to have the proper school supplies for learning at the start of the day and to have an even playing field."

The Warehouse is run by volunteers and depends on donations to fill its supplies. There are corporate donors like Allen Tate Realty, Reynolds American and Publix.

There are many individual donors, too. On Monday afternoon, Pat Hellinger, a retired math teacher, stopped by the Warehouse. He was cleaning out his home and donated a box of math workbooks he had leftover from his time as an educator. He also donated a bag of tennis balls. The Warehouse has tennis balls that teachers will carve a hole in and place on the bottom of chair legs, so the chairs won't make as much noise when students slide them across the floor. Chandler said retired teach-

ers are a frequent source of donations.

The donations are sorted by volunteers and eventually end up in one of several rooms. The supply room is often called "Christmas morning" by teachers with a variety of supplies like markers, pencils, glue sticks, stickers, notebooks, paper and even facial tissue. There's a library room with books to help teachers build their classroom libraries. There is a math and science room along with a language arts and social studies room filled with books and supplies to teach both subjects. Jo Ann Fabrics and Craft Store sponsors a room filled with art supplies.

Chandler said the demand has increased since the Warehouse began in 2011, with 1,500 teachers served last year. She said she was appreciative of the continued community support that allows the warehouse to continue to serve teachers.

To donate supplies, contact Chandler at 336-817-1673 or kchandler3@msn.com. To make a fiscal donation, go to forsythedpartnership.org/d/give.



Champion

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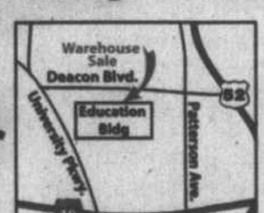
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