

Salem Gardens honors youths

Young achievers feted for excellence

By T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

There was a big to-do in the Salem Gardens Apartment village last week.

Several police cars parked outside of the tiny Salem Gardens Resource Center; other bureaucratic-looking vehicles also lined the lot, causing early morning congestion in the parking lot.

Inside, a small army of cops sat in neatly arranged folding chairs. Several notables claimed other chairs — an alderwoman, a state representative, a couple of U.S. attorneys, a host of business people.

An important awards ceremony brought the group of local heavies together. The ceremony featured the usual trimmings: salutatory speeches, colorful certificates, posed pictures.

But all of it was done in record time for this ceremony. The recipients — already a bit tardy — had to be at school by 10 a.m.

Several young girls were applauded for their part in improving Salem Gardens and helping their neighbors. They were honored as part of the Weed and Seed Program, a national initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Justice and sponsored locally by the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Sherry Williams, 14; Bianca Green, 11; Jayanta Lassiter, 13; Falasade Smith, 11; Shera Williams, 13; Monica Hill, 12;

and Shanika Hill, 12, were the guests of honor at the ceremony.

For months now the girls have been tutoring their younger neighbors after school. They conceived the idea not only to aid youngsters with their school work, but to also give Salem Gardens youths something positive and worthwhile to do during their leisure time.

"I can't say enough about these kids," said William Sturdivant, coordinator for the local Weed and Seed Initiative. "I see them every day and they work hard."

The tutoring sessions started out small — an hour or so of instruction with a few students. But the tutoring caught on in Salem Gardens. The girls say they now tutor more than a dozen youngsters, most between the ages of 3 and 8, in a variety of subjects. Tutoring sessions are held each Tuesday and Thursday and stretch beyond two hours.

"We just thought that this would be something that would keep the kids out of trouble," Falasade said, as the other tutors nodded in agreement.

For a while, the girls struggled to find a place to accommodate their growing slate of students. In the past, they've held sessions in one of their homes or even outside.

"We used to spread a sheet out on the ground in the grass so that everyone could sit down," Sherry recalled.

The girls found the answer to their space woes in the very building in which they were honored. They requested use of the resource center for their tutoring

sessions and it was granted almost immediately.

The resource center was designed as a place for residents to empower and educate themselves. Computers, books and other helpful information are located there. Sturdivant said the youths' tutoring falls right in line with the center's purpose.

Word of the girls' initiative has even made it all the way to Washington. Among those on hand for the awards ceremony was Steve Rickman, national director of the Weed and Seed Initiative. Rickman presented each girl with a certificate and gave the girls professional handshakes.

The girls' parents looked on, oftentimes applauding and snapping pictures.

The girls were also congratulated by Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney Loretta Biggs, who talked excitedly about the girls' endeavor and about the success Weed and Seed has seen over the years.

As its name implies, the program's mission is to "weed out" violent crime and other illegal activity in a particular high-crime area, while in the process "seeding" those areas via social and economic revitalization.

Salem Gardens and Parkview are the targeted Weed and Seed communities in Winston-Salem. Several people talked about the stark changes they've seen in the communities since Weed and Seed was initiated.

"It's definitely a different community now," said Capt. Tim Samuels, a police veteran who is charge of the city's Southside.



Photo courtesy/Weed and Seed Resource Center.
Three of the tutors honored last week read a story to a group of youngsters in the Salem Gardens Resource Center.

Weed and Seed will soon try to work the same magic on other neighborhoods in the city, Sturdivant said. The program will be expanding to Cleveland Avenue, the Happy Hill and Kimberley Park public housing complexes, a portion of Cherry Street and into other sections of the city's Southside.

The girls said they will continue to do their part to make their community better.

They started a tutoring club and say that they are always looking for new members. When asked whether everyone — regardless of age — can do something to make the community better, the girls didn't say a word; instead, they answered with a big collective, affirmative nod.

Their parents, several feet away, did their own nod, and then gave their kids big smiles of approval.

Delta Center to present Mary Burnett Smith

Noted Author to lead discussion on works

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem Delta Fine Arts Inc. will present Mary Burnett Smith, author of two novels, "Miss Ophelia" and "Ring Around the Moon," at a reception and book-signing on Saturday, Nov. 13, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Carver School Road Branch Library (corner of Carver School Road and Lansing Drive). Mrs. Smith will speak about her work and read from her books during the reception.

Born in Warrenton, Va., on March 7, 1931, Mrs. Smith was raised in Montgomery County, Pa., where she attended schools in Jenkintown and Abington townships. In 1948, she entered Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., graduating in 1952 with a bachelor of arts degree in modern foreign languages. After a year on active duty as an ensign in the United States Navy, she began working at Bell Telephone as a service representative.

In 1955, she entered Temple

University to take part in an experimental program sponsored by the Ford Foundation which was designed to recruit junior high school teachers.

She received a master of science degree in education from Temple University in 1959. Mrs. Smith had a rewarding career teaching at several inner-city junior and senior high schools in Philadelphia, where she was an English teacher, English chair and a specialist in reading and the teaching of writing. She won the Lindenbaum Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1979. She retired in 1992 after 38 years of teaching.

In 1991, a friend brought to her attention a short story contest sponsored by Ebony Magazine. Mrs. Smith submitted a story titled "Alfred the Great" and won first prize. The story was published in 1992 and her career as a professional writer began. Her first novel, "Miss Ophelia," was published by

William Morrow Inc., New York, in 1997. Her second novel, "Riding Around the Moon," followed in 1998. She is now working on a third novel, titled "A Funeral in Canaan."

Mrs. Smith, who lives in Elkins Park, Pa., outside of Philadelphia, has been married to Snowden Smith for 43 years and has three children, seven granddaughters and one grandson. Her mother was a natural storyteller and spent many hours entertaining her children with tales of her childhood in rural Virginia. Mrs. Smith attributes the ability she has for telling a good story to her mother.

During the reception and book-signing, Winston-Salem Delta Fine Arts will kick off its annual fund drive. The goal of the 1999-2000 fund drive is \$50,000. Funds from the drive will enable our organization to continue its unique and enriching interdisciplinary programming, which includes year-round exhibitions, classes, workshops, lectures, films, artists' presentations, performances and special projects for children and adults in the areas of visual arts, music, literature, history and folk arts.

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Smith

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