

Manners 101

Elementary students get a crash course on dining etiquette

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

With schools today so focused on making sure that students conquer the three R's, whether they know the difference between a salad fork and a regular fork seems inconsequential.

That's until they sit down for a formal meal with executives from one of the school's most generous business partners.

Ashley Elementary School was faced with that dilemma last week and met it head on. Sara Lee Corp., the school's main business partner, hosted its second farewell luncheon for graduating fifth-graders at a swank local hotel. To prepare the students for the unique dining experience, one of the school's most dedicated volunteers paid for an etiquette expert to come to the school to train the anxious youngsters on

the dos and don'ts of formal dining.

"I think it's important that we do things like this for our African-American children," said Beverly Graham, the school volunteer who paid for the instructor and the delicate place settings the students used during the crash course. "So many of them have not had these etiquette lessons taught to them. Education is important, but so are social skills."

Graham has no children enrolled at Ashley. She began to volunteer regularly when she became acquainted with the school's principal at the church they both attend, Union Baptist. Graham first paid for the etiquette lesson last year before the school's previous crop of fifth-graders went to their luncheon. She said she wanted to do something for the students as a graduation gift.

The lesson was taught this year by Traci King, owner of the trendy downtown salon "the studio." King

spent time with several different classes last Thursday at the school in a classroom that had been converted into a restaurant of sorts. Tables had been pushed together and were covered by a fine table cloth. Formal place settings sat before each student as King instructed them on what to do with each piece and then quizzed them about their uses.

King also showed the young "gentlemen" in the classes how to properly escort and pull out a chair for a young "lady."

"They are eager to learn," said King, who pointed out that she does not teach etiquette regularly but decided to work with the young people after being asked. "They ask good questions...They want to use these skills not only at the luncheon but also in the future."

Graham was impressed with King's presentation. She sat nearby during each of the sessions, occasionally smiling as the students attempted to fold napkins or rearrange their flatware. She said she hoped that some of the students would see King as an example to follow.

"Many do not get to see people like Ms. King - a bright, well-mannered and articulate young black woman," Graham said.

Brenda Butler, the school's principal, said last week's luncheon was just one of many things that Sara Lee has done over the years to help the Ashley family. The school was converted to an elementary school just two years ago. Butler said Sara Lee has been there for the school ever since its first rocky days.

"They have been wonderful," she said. "Not only have they given financial support to this brand new school, they have given a lot of human resource support as far as their staff coming over and working with us."

"The kids are very excited and the adults are very excited that the business end still wants to be involved and be a part of these children's lives."



A young man helps his classmate with her chair.

Photo by Kevin Walker

Sharpton may seek White House

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK - The Rev. Al Sharpton on Sunday said he wants to explore a run for the presidency in 2004.

Sharpton said he will help organize a national effort to find a progressive candidate to run in the Democratic presidential primary, "and I'm available to be that candidate."

In a telephone interview with The Associated Press, Sharpton said that "the Democratic Party failed to protect us in the last election. They did not deal with the disenfranchised voters that were never counted. In many ways they took us for granted. ... We cannot afford to be marginalized."

Noting the Rev. Jesse Jackson's runs for president in 1984 and 1988, Sharpton said: "Twenty years later, we need to do the same thing, and maybe we need another black activist preacher from New York to run, to galvanize people."

He said his purpose would be to promote issues that concern blacks and progressives "and to win as many of these primaries as possible. It would not be just symbolism."

Sharpton told Time magazine, which first reported the reverend's willingness to run, that the idea came to him while he sat under a tree in Sudan, which he visited in April on a fact-finding tour about slavery. He denied that he was taking

advantage of the Rev. Jesse Jackson's tarnished image.

"I'm not one to think that Rev. Jackson's finished," he said. "I'm not trying to take advantage of his travail. My rise is not at Jesse's expense. If I'm rising, it's because I've done the work on issues like police brutality that affect huge numbers of our people."

In January, Jackson acknowledged fathering an out-of-wedlock child with a woman on the staff of his Washington office.

Sharpton ran for U.S. Senate in New York in 1994 and came in third in a four-way contest in the Democratic primary with 25 percent of the vote. In 1997, he took 32 percent of the vote in a Democratic mayoral primary.

HAWS

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and that the administration had them, the residents, at the top of its priority list.

"As we know we have had some rocky roads, but the rocky roads will be filled with sand," he said.

Lonise Bias, the mother of late basketball star Len Bias, served as keynote speaker of the banquet. She uplifted the residents with a message of empowerment and self-sufficiency with residents. Before her address, she said her message is one that residents of HAWS have already taken to heart.

"I just want to encourage them to continue to grow and climb higher and to continue to become a model for other housing authorities throughout the country," she said.

Lawrence said those who believe that public housing residents are largely inactive, should visit some of the communities under the auspices of HAWS.

"The majority of our residents work very hard and are involved in a variety of different programs," he said.

Gloria Moore, an honoree from Sunrise Towers, said she did not know what to expect when she came to public housing two years ago. Moore had a stroke and hip replacement and doctors wanted to make sure she had a safe place to live.

Healy Drive Towers honoree Nancy Church said when she learned that she would be honored at the ceremony, she was shocked.

"We don't expect to be honored," she said of her and her fellow public housing residents. "If we do something, it's only to help our neighbors or someone who is

less fortunate than us."

Jackie McIntyre, a Kimberley Park honoree, is so active that she could not think of what good deed she was being honored for. McIntyre says she doesn't feel productive unless she is out doing something.

"By being active you get to know what's going before it happens. You are in the light when you are active, not in the dark," she said. "Sometimes word of mouth can make things cluttered; I like being active so I can hear firsthand."

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Quotables:

"I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."

- Bill Cosby



Traci King quizzes the students about proper table etiquette.

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