



Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

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MEDIA RELEASE

Succeeding Against the Odds

Community Honors 15 MPS Students for Behavior, Academic Achievements

2nd Staying True Awardees to be hosted by Milwaukee Rotary Club Tuesday, May 27, 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

Fifteen students from seven Milwaukee High Schools are being honored for succeeding against the odds—for turn-arounds in their behavior and/or for excelling in academics despite challenging circumstances. They will receive trophies and medallions at a noon luncheon Tuesday, May 27, hosted by the Milwaukee Rotary Club at the War Memorial Center, 750 N. Lincoln Memorial Drive.

This is the second in a series of “Staying True” awards, created by the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise (CNE) and its Milwaukee community partners the Latino Community Center (LCC) and the Running Rebels Community Organization (RRCO). The first awards ceremony, honoring achievement in the first quarter, was held at a banquet January 29, 2008, with the Mayor, District Attorney, School Board members and School Superintendent among those participating. Future events will honor achievements at the end of each school year.

“In a time when a fight or disturbance among youth is front page news, we want to hold up some who are courageously turning away from negative behaviors and who are striving for educational success,” said Robert L. Woodson, Sr., President of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. “This is an event in which the whole community can come together to honor young people for choosing the right path away from violence.”

Trophies and medallions will be awarded to two students from each of the seven high schools participating in the CNE Violence-Free Zone (VFZ) program, which is currently helping to reduce violence and motivate students in Bay View, Custer, Madison, Marshall, North Division, South Division, and Washington High Schools. One student will be honored from each school for Most Improved Behavior and one for Academic Achievement in Challenging Circumstances. The only exception is that in the case of Bay View High School, twin sisters will receive the behavior award, bringing the total number of awardees to 15.

All 15 awardees will be taken to Torrence's House of Threads to be outfitted with new business attire for the event. "We have found that honoring such young people creates a permanent impact on their lives—reinforcing their achievements and demonstrating that their hard work has good consequences. As part of the process, we like to offer them a new outfit appropriate to their status as young ladies and gentlemen meeting the larger community. For many, this becomes a rite of passage that affects their perception of themselves from then on," Woodson said.

There are more than 900 Milwaukee high school students enrolled in the VFZ program in the seven schools. The program is carried out in the schools by young adults known as Youth Advisors, who are screened, hired, and trained by CNE's community partner organizations the Latino Community Center and Running Rebels. Young adults from the same neighborhoods as the students, the Youth Advisors are able to receive their trust and inspire hope. The VFZ targets the high need young people as identified by school staff in each school, providing special attention and mentoring. CNE has found that about 10% of the students in most schools are responsible for disruptions and violence. In addition to those referred by school staff, some students ask to join the program because they want help and the VFZ staff also recruits students showing leadership qualities.

The Violence-Free Zone program, piloted in two Milwaukee schools two years ago and expanded to four more last fall, adds a new layer of support to students. The VFZ works closely with school safety staff to ensure a safe and orderly environment so that teachers can teach, and coordinates with counselors to provide a high level of support.

First and second quarter Milwaukee Public Schools results indicate significant decreases in suspensions, violent and non-violent incidents in the six high schools that had the VFZ program from the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year. (Madison High School was added to the program in February, 2008). Aggregate numbers for the six schools for the two quarters show an overall decrease of 23% in violent incidents, a 17% decrease in non-violent incidents, and a decrease of 9% in suspensions.

A public/private partnership, the VFZ program is supported by Milwaukee Public Schools with additional support from 11 Milwaukee philanthropies: the Argosy Foundation, the Helen Bader Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Elizabeth Brinn Foundation, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation, the Marshall & Ilesley Foundation, the Faye McBeath Foundation, the Northwestern Mutual Foundation, the Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation, and David and Julia Uihlein.

The Center for Neighborhood Enterprise was founded in 1981 by Woodson to help residents of low income neighborhoods address the problems of their communities and has provided training and technical assistance to more than 2000 leaders of community organizations in 39 states. The Center has a strong focus on reducing youth violence, and the VFZ program is currently working in 28 schools across the country including Antelope Valley, CA (2); Atlanta (3); Baltimore (1); Dallas (10); Milwaukee (7); Washington, DC (3); and Prince George's County, MD (2).