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Cultivating community leaders

St. Louis Internship Program graduates 113 students

By Meliqueica Meadows
Of the St. Louis American

Last Thursday, the St. Louis Internship Program (SLIP) graduated 113 students in a ceremony at A.G. Edwards. After 10 weeks of comprehensive training on the weekends and eight weeks of on-the-job instruction with some of the region's most significant employers, these St. Louis Public Schools sophomores and juniors were awarded for their achievement.

"It began in 1992, and this is the 15th anniversary of providing opportunities for over 1,500 students," SLIP director Shanise Johnson said.

"By being provided with these opportunities at an early age, they are being groomed for the future to develop skills so there will be a diverse workforce."

Both AT&T and The Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis were thanked for continued support since the inception of the program.

During the year-round process, SLPS juniors and seniors are introduced to the world of work through the innovative program that provides youth with the professional development needed to join the regional workforce.

"There is a 10-week training and development component, where the students learn resume writing, interviewing, effective communication, and time and financial management to help them succeed, not just in our program but in life," Johnson said.

"If they pass, they are awarded with an eight-week summer internship and earn a half extracurricular credit. The program also provides ACT coaching and test preparation and will even pay for the exam."

Johnson said the instruction students receive generally results in lower dropout rates and more students pursuing higher education.

"Over 95 percent of our interns graduate from high school and pursue other post-secondary training options. A lot of our graduates work in St. Louis," she said.

Dozens of local business have come onboard to provide internship opportunities for youth. Comedian Arvin Mitchell joined forces to help promote the program in city schools. Johnson said the addition of Mitchell was an intentional move "to help increase the number of male students applying to the program."

Apparently, the funny man's magic paid off, as SLIP received a record number of applications, 250, for the 2006 internship class. That is 41 percent increase from the previous year.

"Our alumni come and give back to this program as speakers and tutors and they moderate sessions," Johnson said. "Some interns have gone on to work for the company they interned with."

Johnson is an example of this, as her involvement with SLIP began when she was a legal intern with the program. After graduating from Soldan High School, she explored careers in government, accounting and consulting before returning to direct the program from which she benefited as a teen.

"I am an alum of this program," she said.

The mission of the St. Louis Internship Program is to provide hope, support, assistance and inspiration to high school students by helping them develop life skills necessary to expand educational and employment opportunities. The program also assists students with the planning and financing of post-secondary career goals.

Since its inception in 1992, more than 2,600 area students have completed the SLIP program. Today, SLIP graduates are enjoying professional careers with sponsoring companies such as Boeing, SBC, St. Louis Public Schools and The Stolar Partnership, while others have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs.

Johnson said SLIP is essential for "creating a critical link between the workforce of today and the future and cultivating the community's future leaders."

For more information, call (314) 371-7547 or visit www.stlouisinternship.org.