



THE FIFTH WARD ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

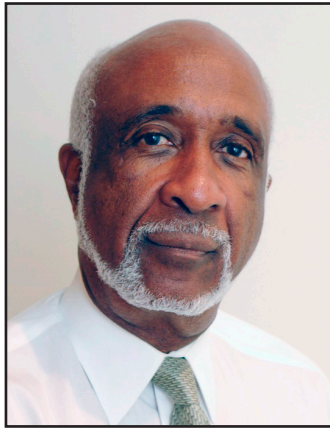
nickel EXPRESS

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An Open Letter to My Family

Twenty two years ago, Fifth Ward was commonly referred to as the “Bloody Fifth.”. The “Ghetto Boys”, crack houses, AIDS, inner-city youths packing AK-47 and Uzi’s (for defending the block?) were emerging forces on the scene. Shotgun houses, unprotected sex/ pre-teen pregnancies, uniformed police (from the Northeast Precinct) waving Confederate flags on Lyons Avenue were some of the living, dominant realities. It may seem like an eternity ago, but for me, those days and nights have rocketed by. Seldom witnessed and practically unheard of then was the sight of a man picking up or dropping off a child at a day care, pushing a stroller, Latina toddlers playing along the street, pizza being delivered or a new home under construction.

In many ways, we’re now in another era. It is way past the time to move ahead and address new rounds of challenges and difficulties. As it is so wisely stated, “The only permanent thing is change itself.”



I too must move on. Everything must change. Things come into being, stay awhile and pass away. That’s the undeniable, irrefutable fact of life. We’re all born with a terminal illness. Two things we can count on are death and taxes. The thing

that is eternal is truth and love, indestructible, undeniable Truth and Love. My physical connection to the FWEP may lessen, but my spiritual relationship grows deeper still.

The Fifth Ward Enrichment Program is a community institution. It is poised to do great things. Endowed with a special purpose, a farsighted vision and a concrete mission, it is a living organism. Sharon Lovick, Cynthia Briggs, Rudy Wagner, Joe Briggs, along with myself, were some of the essential actors who paved the way for the first few acts, the first few

rounds within a continuous saga, to unfold. Now it is up to you, Savage, Richardson, Whipple, Smithers, Morales, Dotson, Tillman, Aguirre, Ellis and Palacios, to name only a few, to continue the journey of a collective will. I, being of sane mind, do hereby humbly request that you grasp the baton, seize the moment and **do** necessary things, the proper deeds. Do great things for the whole, important things for the families, the little, yet profound things for the children, difficult things, the tiresome deeds, splendid efforts, and the often unrewarded, virtually unrecognized jobs. Be and do all the things required and desired moment to moment to produce and reproduce quality living right where you are. Although, and even after January 2007, I will not be the CEO, I will remain and grow even closer to the Fifth Ward Enrichment Family in other ways, and at God’s speed....

Sincerely yours,
Ernest

Be and do all the things required and desired moment to moment to produce and reproduce quality living right where you are.

Ernest McMillian

ALUMNUS PROFILE:

An Interview with Roberto Silva

Note: Roberto Silva is 33 years old. He enrolled in the FWEP when he was a six grader at E. O. Smith Middle School in 1986.

Nickel Express: Please describe what life for you has been like over the past few years.

Robert: Growing up was kind of hectic. I didn't have my father figure for awhile. He left when I was 13 and came back when I was 18. Not until I had my daughter three years ago did I understand the father, the father/son thing, and now things are beginning to turn around for the better between him and me. It's been real good. You know, when you're young, when you're a boy, you need your father, someone to guide you, to show you the ropes. My mother did both jobs and it was kind of hard. I was kind of stubborn at times, but we worked through it. Thanks to the Enrichment Program, it helped me stay focused, stay out of trouble, and I made it through. I gave it a try, since I wanted to stay out of trouble. It kept me busy after school and throughout the school years when I was in middle school. We'd go different places, different outings. Summer camp was nice. Having guys around, someone to interact with beyond the school was something that helped me out.

Nickel Express: What was your FWEP experience like as a Hispanic person?

Robert: We had just moved in the neighborhood from a mainly Hispanic neighborhood to the Fifth Ward, a predominantly Black neighborhood, so I had to learn how to run quick. I had a couple of run-ins. At the program,



"I am happiest being a father and a husband"

I wasn't considered an outcast. It was like a brotherhood thing. Even though I wasn't black, I was treated equally. I wasn't mistreated. I was always respected. It was a big influence. It helped me to respect myself, my family, kept me concentrated, moving along.

Nickel Express: What differences do you see among youths of today? What would you say to them as something you've learned from experience?

Robert: There are a lot of good things they can get into like the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program, but the thing is, they don't like being told what to do, being guided in the straight path. Many of them don't have the mentality that what you do as a young person reflects on you and how you grow up. You take the wrong path as a teenager, go to juvenile (detention), well that's the first step to going to prison. A lot of them don't make it; they end up dead before they're 30. I see it a lot. I was taught to respect others. Nowadays, many kids don't learn this, the little things like saying 'please' and 'thank you.' When they show respect for themselves, things will work out for them later on.

Nickel Express: What about life today that brings you satisfaction, your greatest joy, your happiness?

Robert: Now I'm a father and it's great. I didn't have a father for awhile and I didn't know what it would be like. Now I have my

daughter and it's great! That's one of the greatest things that's happened to me in life. I'm married, I'm happily married. My wife has been real good to me; we're good to each other. We understand each other. I still have my mother and father. We live far from each other, but we're real close to each other, one way or the other.

Nickel Express: What are your biggest challenges, and your goals for the future? What would you most like to accomplish?

Robert: I wish I had gone to college or trade school or something. I didn't have the luxury. My father had spinal cord surgery and I had to help out and be the man, since I was the oldest boy. When I graduated, I had to work full-time to help the family. I don't regret helping my family, but I wish I had gone to a university or trade school because I'm doing hands-on labor type stuff now. I wish I could have it a little bit easier, where I could spend more time with my family, give them a better life, a better place to live, a solid vacation when we need one instead of pulling nickels and dimes to just go to the beach, you know? It's not too late for me now, but I'm being a husband and a father, so I have to provide. If I start to go to school, who knows, I may put myself in a bigger hole than what I'm in. We're not financially set at the moment where I can do that.

Highlights from FWEP Events



FWEP Delegation at Peace Awards Banquet



Program participants Make a Toast at Peace Awards Banquet



Fall Holiday Fishing Trip



FWEP Kids With Councilmembers Sue Lovell and Adrian Garcia



Community Services at Legacy Community Grand Opening



FWEP Family Thanksgiving Celebration Dinner



Program participant Presents Mime Skit at Thanksgiving Family Celebration

FWEP Alumnus Address Law Students on Fatherhood Issues.

Fatherhood rights, including child support, custodianship, paternity and apparent legal biases are among the every day realities of many young fathers today. Their views, concrete experiences and commentaries were the topic of a panel discussion held in the classroom of Judge/Professor Frank Pierce at Southwest School of Law with third-year law students on November 7.

FWEP alumni, graduates of the program from more than a decade ago were invited by Judge Pierce to interact with his students about their legal experiences. Responding to the call were Lynn Chavis, Christopher Farriel, and Trevor Palacios, each young dads about

29 years old.

Comments on their respective presentations provoked some thoughts from the law students. They include the following comments: "All the speakers brought a perspective of the battle a father faces in getting parenting rights. Often there is too much focus on the deadbeat dad and nothing on the dads that do care." Another comments included, "This was a much-needed shot of real life to our often sheltered 'law school world' ... "The brutal honesty and genuineness made for one of the most real classes I have ever had in law school"... "It was an enlightening experience for me"... "I could really tell (they)wanted (their children) to have things he did not



and to learn from his mistakes.

(They) really made the point that some fathers want to be involved and might be better parents than people give them credit for..." "The panel was awesome! I have never heard that perspective and as a future family law attorney, I very much appreciate the opportunity to hear about their plight. I have a lot of respect for these young men and their desire to be responsible fathers"... And finally from Judge Pierce himself, "I believe the young fathers had a profound effect on them."

TEC YOUTH EMBRACE THE HOLIDAY SPIRIT!

By Charles Savage

...November 2006...

The young men of the Teen Enterprise Center (TEC) kicked off the holiday season with a tremendous gesture of generosity and love. The Computer Repair Club awarded two refurbished laptop computers to deserving individuals during the week preceding the Thanksgiving Holidays.

Ms. Tre'Neia Smithers, a senior at Jack Yates High School and daughter of Fifth Ward Enrichment Program staff administrator, Maria Smithers, had written a letter requesting the aid of the Computer Club to help her locate an inexpensive laptop computer for her advanced studies and college preparatory work. She plans to attend Sam Houston State University, major in communications, with a minor in marketing, and then pursue a career in sports broadcasting and marketing. Mr. Michael Hampton, Computer Club instructor, after reading Tre'Neia's letter, invited her to the center on November 14. He acknowledged her well-written letter and congratulated her on her quest to not only attend college, but to pursue her chosen career path.

With camera bulbs flashing, Tre'Neia was awarded a laptop computer, at no charge, by Mr. Hampton and the Computer Club. The club members are Isaiah Baker, Aaron Small, Allan Richardson, Rayland Lane, all Wheatley High students, and Amir Johnson of Our Mother of Mercy School. The computer is Internet ready and fully loaded with the necessary software needed to assist in her studies.

On the following day, November 15, the TEC hosted visitors Martin Woodard, Ms. Edith Gantt and her son, Theron. Ms. Gantt was introduced to FWEP by Martin Woodard, long time friend and supporter of the Fifth Ward, but also one this community's better known service providers in the field of family counseling. Mr. Woodard informed FWEP of Ms. Gantt's desire, and great need of, a laptop computer to help support her growing, home-based popcorn business. Ms. Gantt is the sole provider and caretaker for Theron, who has cerebral palsy. Her home is very congested with the special equipment required to aid in Theron's mobility and comfort and, therefore, a mobile laptop served her needs better than a stationary desk top computer. Mr. Woodard and Ms Gantt discussed the cause and affects

...See **TEC Youth Embrace** on next page



United Way Volunteers Review the FWEP's Work

On Nov. 1, 2006, a panel of United Way volunteers and staff members conducted their annual Organizational Review of the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program. Several parents of FWEP youth participants, youths from E. O. Smith and Wheatley, FWEP volunteer Board members and FWEP alumni joined FWEP staffers to share their perspectives on the important work the agency has done and continues to do within the target community. Mrs. Salima Khan, for example, spoke of her appreciation for the support given to her son's school efforts and in becoming a part of the community. Bralon Lee, a Wheatley High School senior, expressed how he is encouraged and enabled to stay focused on his future goals by his parents and FWEP working together. Mr. Jimmie Dotson, Chairman of the FWEP Board of Directors, stated how necessary FWEP is in diverting youths away from the criminal justice system and toward good citizenry. Benson Tillman, FWEP alumnus and board member, commented that becoming a dad who works hard and makes time to staying positively connected with his daughter were values continuously reinforced through FWEP when he was a teenager.

The FWEP is an affiliate of the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast and has been so since 1992.



TEC Youth Embrace ...Continued from page 4

and comments from the youth and some of them took the opportunity to visit with Theron and shake his hand. Mr. Hampton and the his "computer guys" presented Ms. Gantt with her fully-loaded, Internet-ready computer and Mr. Curley Marshall, Photography Club instructor, along with his photographers – Justin Lee, Henry Walker, Todd Keener, and Denzil Atkins (all Wheatley High students) – snapped many, many pictures of the proceedings. Ms. Gantt received a brief tutorial and operating instructions from the computer guys for proper use of the laptop, the additional hardware accessories, and the installed software. Also present for this special moment were Wheatley student Bralon Lee and FWEP staff members Shawn Owens (Peer Health Coordinator), Daiman Johnson (Wheatley Project Manager), and Charles Savage (Chief of Operations). Ms. Gantt surprised everyone with the gift of a beautifully wrapped, multi-colored tower of delicious popcorn balls that she prepared for the young men of the TEC! It was a great day for learning, understanding, loving and giving. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!!

Juvenile Justice Forum

Children at Risk, South West Juvenile Justice Center, Texas Coalition Advocating Justice for Juveniles and the Fifth Ward Enrichment Program co-hosted a teach-in, a forum on the Juvenile Justice System. The Forum was held on October 5 at the United Way headquarters on Waugh Drive. Knowledgeable speakers interacted with concerned community residents and youth advocates to discuss the state of juvenile justice, and discussed what is needed to ensure safety while providing the best possible futures for Texas youths.

A panel consisting of State Representative **Harold Dutton** (Chair of the State Legislature's Juvenile Justice and Family Issues Committee); **Sylvester Turner** (Chair of the Texas House Corrections Committee's Appropriations Sub Committee; **Eric Andell** (former Civil Appeals Court Judge; Deputy **Constable F. Gallegos** (Harris County Precinct 6); and **Benny Hernandez** (American Civil Liberties Union), shared their rich perspectives and addressed issues arising from the audience participants. **Equality** and **Savvy** (from the Blackout Artists' Collective) gave a spirited spoken word performance, reflecting a telling youth perspective.



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Calendar of Events

DECEMBER 2006

December 2

Keep "5" Alive -
Clean Up

December 13

Christmas Giving (TBA)



December 14

Christmas Family
Celebration (TBA)

December 15 -16

Winter Leadership
Retreat

December 18 - 29

HISD Winter/Christmas
Holidays

December 25 - 26

FWEP Office(s) Closed

JANUARY 2007

January 1

FWEP Office Closed

January 1 - 2

HISD Closed

January 10

FWEP Board Meeting

January 15

MLK "Stop the Violence
Rally" Kashmere
9am - 3pm

January 15

HISD Closed

FEBRUARY 2007

February 7

Annual Youth
Advocacy Day;
Austin Texas
(TBA)

February 9

HISD Closed

February 22

FWEP "Heritage Bowl"

*: Tentative Items
TBA: To Be Announced
PP's: Program Participants

FWEP Youth Support Legacy Community Health's Grand Opening

More than a dozen FWEP youths from Lamar Fleming Middle School and E. O. Smith Educational Center were eager supporters of the Legacy Health Center's Grand Opening at the Lyons Avenue Health Clinic on October 28. FWEP youths are routinely engaged in community services and civic engagement projects throughout the year. These youths let their actions speak loudly by becoming involved in community uplift, and promoting healthy lifestyles. On this particularly beautiful and warm Saturday, FWEP youths prepared and served popcorn, snow-cones and sodas, set up information booths, distributed literature and helped in the clean up.

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