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Horner resident recognized for his academic achievement

Financial whiz kid first in family to get college degree

CHICAGO (Jan. 20, 2010) – Donald Banks always liked equations. Growing up in Chicago Housing Authority’s Henry Horner Homes, he says he was a “kid who liked to solve problems.”

Banks turned his passion for problem-solving into a personal milestone last month as he became the first person in his family to earn an advance degree in Agricultural and Consumer Economics from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

For his hard work, Banks was presented Tuesday with an Academic Achievement Award by Interstate Realty Management (IRM) Company Educational Foundation and the Chicago Housing Authority for his outstanding academic performance. He was recognized at a special ceremony during the CHA’s monthly Board of Commissioners meeting.

Banks said his fascination with finance started during a high school internship at the Chicago Board of Trade. He eventually became proficient enough that he served as a financial wellness intern at his high school helping classmates with scholarship, loan budgeting and financial planning.

“Everyone thinks finance is just about money; but there’s a lot of emotion that is tied into people’s finances,” he said. “There’s way more to it than who has the big money.”

Banks is a three-time IRM Educational Foundation Scholar and the 2009 recipient of the IRM Frank Nash Memorial Scholarship.

“The scholarships from IRM were definitely a blessing,” Banks said. “I don’t know if anybody knows the cost of tuition – but it’s a lot. It’s nice to have someone care about my education.”

Lewis A. Jordan, CEO of the CHA, praised Banks for his accomplishments and for serving as a role model for other youth.

He told him that this accomplishment will be just one of many that he is destined to achieve in life.

“Donald Banks is a fine example of how determination and making the right decisions can be beneficial,” Jordan said. “As a product of public housing myself, I know how difficult the road can be to navigate. We are proud – but certainly not surprised – that Donald’s achievements are pointing him toward a bright future.”

The Interstate Realty Management Educational Foundation, a non-profit created in 1991 by The Michaels Organization Chairman and CEO Michael J. Levitt, has distributed more than \$2.2 million in educational grants to more than 1,100 residents at properties owned or managed by Michaels Development or its sister company, Interstate Realty Company.

“We are very proud to be able to give back to the communities where we own and manage properties in this very tangible way,” said Mark Morgan, the President of Interstate Realty Management who attended Tuesday’s ceremony. “We are delighted to make this contribution to Donald’s education. He’s a great kid and we are proud of his hard work and commitment to pursuing his educational goals.”

Banks wants to start a community basketball league in his Horner neighborhood – as athletics served to keep him more focused in school.

In addition, he supports the CHA’s Plan for Transformation: “There were a lot of programs that not only got people jobs, but helped them fix their credit and taught them what to wear to a job interview and how to give a firm handshake and how to use proper etiquette. I think CHA is doing a great job and it’s something that I want to be part of.”

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