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CHA Residents Honored for their Inspiration, Success

Mayor Daley helps celebrate resident successes under the Plan for Transformation

Richard Grundy is one example of a CHA resident bringing his success full circle .

The 23-year-old LeClaire Courts resident graduated from Central State University with a dual degree in criminal justice and psychology in May 2008. Like most graduates entering the workforce for the first time, Grundy struggled to find work. But instead of getting discouraged, he took a temporary job at American Girl Place, sought career counseling through CHA FamilyWorks agencies and was eventually hired as a senior case manager at Heartland Human Care Services. Now, he helps fellow public housing residents become self-sufficient.

Grundy is one of 14 individuals who were recognized for their inspirational stories or scholastic achievements Saturday morning at CHA's inaugural Resident Recognition and Scholarship Breakfast at the Palmer House Hilton.

Mayor Richard M. Daley, CHA CEO Lewis A. Jordan and CHA Commissioner Dr. Mildred Harris were on hand to present scholarships to students living in CHA buildings and awards to CHA leaseholders who have overcome obstacles and demonstrated extraordinary achievements through the Plan for Transformation.

While the Plan for Transformation is best known for its goal to rebuild 25,000 units of housing, there is also a commitment to provide residents with the educational and recreational tools needed to improve their futures. Partnering with philanthropies, sister government institutions and community groups, the CHA has created an array of educational, vocational training and job placement opportunities to CHA renters.

"Ten years into the boldest and most ambitious community rebuilding initiative in America, many CHA residents feel a sense of possibility for the first time in decades," CEO Lewis Jordan told the audience assembled in the Palmer House's Empire Room. "Today, we honor those who have taken full advantage of opportunities offered to build better lives for themselves and their families,"

Carmen Hart, a community-conscious resident whose family was one of the first to move into Stateway Gardens in 1958, was also honored Saturday. Carmen was active in the Stateway community and served on the Local Advisory Council. As the structure deteriorated over the years, she was eager for Stateway to be replaced, and when the offer came to return to the replacement property of Park Boulevard, Carmen was ready.

With the help of service providers at Stateway Community Partners, Carmen found employment as a home health aide, and loves life in her beautiful new town home.

Another honoree, Chalonda McIntosh, moved into a five-bedroom apartment at Parkside of Old Town in December 2008 – the latest chapter of a long journey for her and her family of six.

Chalonda's son, six-year-old E.Z., was born with a seizure disorder and has since undergone two brain surgeries, including one in January 2009. To care for her son after the surgery, Chalonda took a leave of absence from her job at Uhlich Children's Advantage Network (UCAN). Though her income drastically reduced, she took advantage of resources in her community to ensure that the needs of her family were met.

Chalonda returned to work in April and continues to keep a smile on her face and serve as an inspiration to her friends, family co-workers and community.

And Raul Colon, who lives in Hispanic Housing Scattered Sites, wanted to do more to help his mother with bills and other household costs. Through FamilyWorks agency Employer and Employment Services, he applied for a job as a freight agent at an aviation support company stationed at O'Hare International Airport. Raul performed his job so well, that he received two raises and was promoted to supervisor within months. He now has his own office, manages 12 people, and makes enough money to help his mom make ends meet.

He says he wants to position himself serve as a role model for young people.

"I would like to show that if you work hard, it will take you somewhere," Raul said.

CHA Commissioner Harris and God's First Ministries also awarded ten \$1,000 scholarships to exceptional undergraduates and college-bound seniors. The recipients are as follows:

- Mr. Lamont Enis, Westwood College
- Mr. Darius Gaines, Fisk University
- Mr. Xavier Gaines, Graceland University
- Mr. Brandon Gillespie, Morehouse College / Georgetown University
- Ms. Charlene Jones, National-Louis University
- Mr. Michael Miles, Chicago State University
- Mr. Jeffrey Perkins, DePauw University
- Ms. Crystal Walker, Illinois State University
- Mr. Anthony Walls, Bethune-Cookman University
- Ms. Asha Wesley, Spellman College

NBC Channel 5 entertainment reporter LeeAnn Trotter hosted the ceremony, while musical group Anointed Fire, Anointed Praise and Christian neo-soul recording artist Kim Stratton provided entertainment.

Note for Editors: Photos of the event are available upon request.

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