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20th
anniversary

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BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF DANE COUNTY Annual "Building Winners" Breakfast

By A. DAVID DAHMER

"One of the things that I'm really proud about in our organization is that because of you last year, 100 percent of our kids in



Mekhi Ball's sings Justin Bieber's hit song "Baby."

our college prep program graduated from high school," said Boys & Girls Club of Dane County President and CEO Michael Johnson at the annual Building Winners "Rise & Shine" Breakfast April 27 at the Allied Family Center.

About 500 people from all around Dane County came together that morning to listen to education initiatives and accomplishments highlighted by the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County (BGDC).

Mike Victorson, president and CEO of M3 Insurance, was the emcee for the event which featured numerous presentations and performances including Mekhi Ball's rousing performance of Justin Bieber's hit song "Baby."

Denzel Irby, the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County Youth of the Year, was the keynote speaker at the event. "When I had an opportunity to give back to a program that has given so much to me, I jumped at the opportunity," Irby told the crowd.

Denzel said that he moved to Madison when he was in fifth



Annual "Building Winners" Breakfast (L-r): Ronald Cato, BGDC Youth of the Year Denzel Irby; BGDC CEO Michael Johnson, George Yelder, and James Blilie

grade where he lived just a few blocks from the Boys & Girls Club. "At first, I was afraid to go to the Boys & Girls Club, but in a short amount of time, I figured out that that was the best decision I made in my life," he remem-

bered. "In a short amount of time, I began to get involved in so many things that I never even wanted to go home. It just felt like I was a part of a whole family."

Irby recalled the Boys & Girls Club's help in his taking his first steps to becoming a young man. He joined a program at the club

called "Passport to Manhood" where he began to explore some key aspects in becoming a man including improving his self-identity, understanding his community, and gaining leadership skills. "This is a place that provides food and shelter for kids like me, but I also

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UW Odyssey Program graduation set for May 11



The graduation ceremony for students of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Odyssey Project Class of 2010-2011 will take place Wednesday, May 11, 6:30-9 p.m. at the UW-Memorial Union, 800 Langdon St. Project Director Emily Auerbach and Writing Coach Marshall Cook will present certificates attesting to students' successful completion of six introductory UW credits in English. Wisconsin's former First Lady Jessica Doyle will offer congratulatory remarks.

From September to May, students in this rigor-

ous humanities course have discussed great works of literature, American history, philosophy, and art history while developing skills in critical thinking and persuasive writing. The evening will include brief remarks or performances by each graduating student; recognition of supplemental teachers Jean Feraca, Gene Phillips, and Craig Werner; acknowledgment of Odyssey Project donors and supporters; and music and refreshments.

HABITAT RESTORE

Ten years of helping families and making Madison greener

By A. DAVID DAHMER

Working in partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Dane County, the Habitat ReStore sells donated building materials to the general public for up to 75 percent off the retail price and uses those sales to provide enough income to

build two or three Habitat for Humanity homes in Dane County a year.

That is what can best be described as a win-win situation.

"I've always wanted to have a place like this. I thought it would be nice to be able to keep this stuff

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Habitat for Humanity CEO Perry Ecton and Jen Voichick, director of the Habitat ReStore

Obama aims to reconnect with loyal Black voters

By STARLA MUHAMMAD
SPECIAL TO THE NNPA FROM THE
FINAL CALL

CHICAGO - In 2008, Barack Hussein Obama was elected with overwhelming support from Black voters. More than 90 percent of Blacks voted for him in the presidential election and his victory was a source of pride.

However, while the president's approval ratings are still high, recent polls show a decline in popularity. Announcing his plans for re-election in April, maintaining strong support among Black voters is key. Unemployment among Blacks is still high at 15.5 percent despite the overall unemployment rate decreasing.

Critics say President Obama may be taking the Black vote for granted as members of the Democratic Party have been accused of for years. "Where previous Democratic administrations have treated Black communities with benign neglect, Obama's policy is best described as depraved indifference," wrote Glen Ford, executive editor of Black Agenda Report in a recent

online posting.

With that perception in mind, the Obama administration recently launched a series of town hall meetings targeting Black communities across the U.S. Almost simultaneously, the White House launched

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/africanamericans>, as a way for Blacks to get information on policies, programs, and initiatives the administration says help the Black community.

The town hall meetings, themed, "Winning the future," are open forums, which allow the public to ask questions directly to White House personnel. Michael Blake, director of African American and Minority Business Outreach from the White House Office of Public Engagement was in Chicago, in mid-April, for a town hall meeting on the city's South Side.

Along with Mr. Blake, the event featured and Congressman Danny Davis Jr. (D-IL) and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, and was moderated by radio host Matt McGill of

WVON 1690 AM. Hundreds packed a standing room only overflow room at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church to voice opinions about the White House agenda for the Black community.

One area of success shared Mr. Blake, was the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) through the U.S. Commerce Department being awarded \$7 billion in grants to advance the growth of minority owned businesses. However, this includes Black, Latino, and women-owned businesses.

What remains unclear is what dollar amount was received by Black-owned businesses.

Questions remain as to why information has been so slow reaching the Black community. One problem could be that the Obama administration has not allocated enough resources to spread word of their accomplishments, which directly impact Black people, even Mr. Blake admitted that this "office of African-American affairs" is comprised only of himself and an intern. Additionally, Mr. Blake said, he only sees President Obama "every few weeks."

Congressman Davis reminded the audience President Obama took office when the country was about to go to "hell in a hand basket." Mr. Davis told the audience he was not present to be an apologist for the White House or President Obama but said were it not for steps taken by the administration; he is not sure whether the banking system would have survived.

"If we didn't do the health reform that people are trying to erode and wipe out, just in my congressional district alone the health reform bill improves healthcare and access for 350,000 people," said Rep. Davis to applause.

Blake said though there is a long way to go, progress has been made he said that has benefited the Black community. "People are still hurting right now and we're not where we need to be and we're trying to get to where we need to be, but as Congressman Davis will tell you, it's hard right now working with some folks that don't want to work with you," a clear reference to the Republicans, he told the audience.

The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan warned President Obama prior to his election about the forces that govern domestic and international politics. He has also encouraged President Obama to use his prominent position to speak for the weak and speak for the poor who supported him overwhelmingly. In a previous interview with WVON's Cliff Kelley, Farrakhan said that as a Black man, President Obama does not wish to address the concerns that God wants the American government to address, such as the lack of justice for the weak, poor, and Brown, Red, Black and poor White.

A vocal group attempted to pose questions to Blake regarding President Obama's decision to go to war with the North African nation of Libya, however, the meeting was ended abruptly before they could receive answers.

Before ending the meeting Blake urged audience members to contact his office at 202-456-4772 or email him at africanamericans@who.eop.gov to share their concerns.

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come to the Boys and Girls Club to get help with homework and to find information about getting a job," Denzel said.

Next year, Denzel added, he will be attending DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the nation and the largest private institution in Chicago. "I'm actually 1 out of 33 kids in the

burnt down, and we got a new building. As an 11-year-old kid, all I knew was that it belonged to us, it was new, and we had pride when we walked into that building," she remembered.

Banks said that she attended a summer camp at the Boys & Girls Club and now her boys, Maxwell and Malik, enjoy those camps, too.

in which we live, I encourage you all to not only to give of your financial resources, but also your gifts and your talents. You never know who the next community member you will be affecting."

Following Banks' talk, the Shamrock Shuffle board of directors presented a gigantic \$40,000 check for the Boys & Girls Club of

with the 2011 Hero Award. Laurene Bach won the 2011 Volunteer of the Year Award, and Tyler Nicole Henderson received the \$1,000 Racine Scholarship, an annual scholarship presented by Dirk and Sue Racine.

"You look at all the young people who spoke today — [BGDC youth] Denzel, Mekhi, Anthony — these are the real names of real kids who will make a real difference in whatever life brings their way and whatever people come through their path because of the Boys & Girls Club and because of your generosity and participation," Victorson said in his closing remarks for the breakfast. "As you leave here today, be encouraged and be excited about the hope and the promise that this club brings to the kids all over the town."

Dane County. This is the 8th year that the Madison Shamrock Shuffle — a 5K, 10K and 2-mile walk starting on Madison's State Street on St. Patrick's Day Weekend — raised significant money for the Club.

Tim Metcalfe was presented



country accepted to the DePaul theater program," he said. "I want to thank everybody from the bottom of my heart for caring and looking out for me. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank everyone that is participating and has been involved with the Boys & Girls Club."

LeeAnne Banks, a BGDC parent of two children, was the impact speaker at the breakfast and told the crowd that she was a fourth-generation south-side resident. "When I was a kid growing up on the south side, I spent a lot of time in that Neighborhood Center. One day that building

"And one day I came to pick up my son Malik early from the Boys & Girls Club to go home and he said, 'I'm going to stay and finished the planned program, momma, called Passport to Manhood. I need to learn to become a man,'" Banks remembered.

"But even though the Boys & Girls Club is doing a fabulous job with our youth today, we still have a long way to go," Banks added. "In Madison, 47 percent of African American boys do not graduate from high school and most end up in prison. This is mostly due in part to the lack of access to resources available in the community

