

Pillars of Hope Program

The University of Rochester is part of the citywide Pillars of Hope Program; a collaboration with the City of Rochester's Bureau of Youth Services that recruits African-American professionals from the Rochester Community to serve as role models for students.

According to the dictionary, "pillars" are either structure offering freestanding vertical support or individuals with central or great responsibility. But for one group of African-American professionals from across the University, both definitions apply. Once a month during the academic year, these "Pillars of Hope" meet with students at Rochester's School No. 29 to offer educational support and serve as an example of success for urban students.



This year's Pillars include Janice Holland, Deborah McDell-Hernandez, Michelle Thompson-Taylor, Catrina Rockwell, Robyn Carter-McFadden, Catherine Thomas, and Michele Allen.

Each year, as part of the end of the year celebration, the students visit one of the University's



departments. On May 28, 2010 the students visited the School of Medicine and Dentistry, and enjoyed a laboratory experience facilitated by Karen Culley; a Laboratory Technician of SM&D. The laboratory experience included viewing specimens and parasites through a microscope, and plastinated specimens of the heart, kidney and lung that they were able to touch. The students were introduced to pathogens that cause disease and parasites that are problematic in other parts of the world to provide understanding of why sanitation and clean water is important.

After the lab experiment, the students of school #29 enjoyed a Caribbean lunch to embrace the diversity of their cultures. According to Catrina Rockwell; Administrative Assistant of SM&D "As a Pillar of Hope I believe that we should encourage our children to explore their culture. Instead of serving the usual lunch; pizza and subs, we provided Caribbean food that is healthy, filling and food the children are culturally familiar with."

During lunch each student was presented with a book from the Office of Human Resources – Multicultural Affairs and Inclusion. The books were received from the First Book Grant; an organization that provides books for students in an effort to address literacy needs.



Each Pillar of Hope provided a quote describing why they feel the program is important. Deborah McDell-Hernandez; Community Outreach Coordinator of MAG feels “Children learn best by example and I support the Pillars of Hope Program because I am able to be a role model for students and share my love of helping and teaching others.”

According to Catherine Thomas, MSW; Director of Patient & Family Resource Center and Coordinator of Volunteer Services at the James P. Wilmot Cancer Center “The Pillars of Hope provide a two-fold experience; a commitment from a group of professionals that look like them and the ability for students to actualize what has been shared to them throughout the year with a field trip.”

Michele Allen; URM Staff Accountant “To inspire children to dream big and realize there are no limits of what they can achieve in life.”



Pillar Robyn Carter-McFadden, Director of Education and Diversity Affairs SM&D, leaves them with this message: “It was wonderful interacting with the children from school #29! It was a day of sharing! We had an opportunity to share with them what we do as professionals in our everyday life in hope of inspiring them to do the same and more!”