

# NSBE makes a brighter future for students

Sunday, May 29, 2011

By HOLLY KOZELSKY - Bulletin Accent Editor

A Martinsville organization that aims to encourage students toward college and technical careers has earned recognition as the best in the nation.

The local chapter of the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) Pre-College Initiative (PCI), headed by Martinsville Middle School teacher Helen Howell, was honored at the organization's national convention in St. Louis. Additionally, one of its members, Rosheena Hairston, won the Golden Torch Award, which is given to the top female and male junior NSBE member each year.

Hairston, the daughter of Roger Dalton and Mabel Campbell, graduated Saturday from Carlisle School. She plans to attend Virginia Commonwealth University with a major in engineering.

Hairston had her eye on the Golden Torch Award since she joined NSBE in seventh grade, she said.

She was in good company: Her cousin Cedric Penn and her friend Nakeisha Davis had won the award earlier, "so I watched them get it, also," Hairston said. "I've always said I wanted to get that award."

To be in the running, she had to send off her school transcripts, letters of recommendation and documentation of several regional awards she has won.

"It was a great pleasure" to be called to the stage as the award recipient, she said. "When I came out there and he (entertainer LL Cool J) kissed me on the cheek, I just about fainted."

Hairston credits Howell with inspiring her and other NSBE members.

"She's a very good lady," Hairston said. "She takes very much time with her students. ... She wants nothing but for her students to excel, (and) she does all she can" for them.

Hairston said that her experiences with NSBE led her to see engineering as a good career path.

"I've always loved designing, math and science," she said. Participating in NSBE's conventions, science fairs and academic competitions has given her countless good opportunities, she added.

After college, she hopes to work in engineering management, she said.

Hairston's mother, Mabel Campbell, has been to all but one of the yearly NSBE conventions with her.

Flying out to the conventions in a group of 60 or so people, mostly students and some chaperones, "is a big deal," Campbell said.

It is inspiring at a national convention to see "10,000 or 15,000 other children striving to be a potential engineer. When I see all of these students and people there, I look back at our hometown and I say, 'Wow, there's a lot of children who don't have a clue of what they are really missing out on.'"

"It's something to see," Campbell added, "when you see all those students in black tie."

Campbell said the great experiences the students have with NSBE is backed by a lot of hard work on behalf of Howell and the students' families in fundraising and other support activities.

"We do ... a lot of doughnut sales, candy sales, flea markets, car washes, a step show, and other events like Men in Aprons at the museum. We did a hat show," she said.

Campbell echoed her daughter's praise of Howell. "Her interest ... is trying to get a child to the next level," she said.



Martinsville High School seniors and NSBE junior members Darius Simington (above left) and Devante Martin (above right) are featured on the cover of the Summer 2011 NSBE Bridge magazine for an interview they conducted with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa P. Jackson (center). Beside her are NSBE Jr. members Alexis Clark (left) of Stafford and Alicia Tate of Maryland.

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Howell pushes the families as well as the students, Campbell added. "There are times we parents don't have the drive like she does. In the same token, we know what she's doing is in our kids' best interest. We're busy cooking, cleaning, ironing, some going to work, so when Mrs. Howell's coming at us we get a little frustrated — but that's OK, because you want just as much for your child as she does."

Howell said it was her daughter, Rachelle, who turned her on to NSBE in 1999. Rachelle was involved in NSBE as a chemical engineering major at N.C. A&T University.

"During that time, industry was at its best in Martinsville," Howell said. Instead of furthering their education, many students were tempted just to go into factory jobs directly from high school. Howell saw the experiences NSBE offered as a great incentive for students to continue their education.

"The organization is important for the African-American student because it provides opportunities for students that they never thought possible," Howell said. "The organization does change students for the better, and parents recognize the benefits of the program."

Local NSBE members have a "100 percent graduation rate, and 100 percent of the students go on to higher education or the military," Howell said.

Local students have participated in NSBE events as far away as Canada and Turkey.

Howell serves as a consultant to help other communities start NSBE programs. She said NSBE is open to all students, regardless of race.

Devante Martin and Darius Simington, both 10th-graders at MHS, were two of the four NSBE junior members who interviewed Environmental Protection Agency administrator Lisa Perez Jackson March 16 in Washington DC. Their article was published in the Summer edition of "NSBE Bridge" and also illustrates the magazine's front cover.

Perez, a former officer of NSBE, is a chemical engineer.

That makes the seventh time the Martinsville chapter has been featured in the NSBE magazine. The local chapter has won nine national awards.

Forty-eight students attended the national convention on a five-day trip in March. Funds came from a grant Howell had applied for as well as fundraisers and donations.

To qualify to attend the conference, students must earn "merit points." Having a grade point average (GPA) between 3.3-3.5 earns 300 points, and a 3.6-4.0 GPA earns 400 points. Students receive 5 points for each hour of documented community service, 50 points for fulfilling a leadership role and 25 points for serving as committee chair or attending particular events.

Other students who attended the conference were: Kelsey Hairston, Terrica Hairston, Lauren Foster, Candance Foster, Tanisha Ross, Roderick Ross, Taylor Carter, Tajuana Carter, Breosha King, Patrice Adams, Dahilia Pettie, Mariah Carter, Marshanda Wells, Dwayzha Taylor, Asia Harrison, Roshona Blount, Byron Carter, Darius Simington, Devante Martin, Joe Mitchell, Timothy Ross, Malik Jones, Rea Page, Bianca Davis, Alexah Eure, Autumn Clark, Nataysha Jamison, Jentonia Wilson, Kimyn Moore, Britney Wade, Jamelle Prunty, Amber Dillard, Jasmine Agee, Jada Wade, Bryan Rucker, Kayla Cabiness, Celena Thobbs, Chantel Spencer and Keshawn Penn.

The Martinsville chapter is part of NSBE's Region II, which includes Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Washington D.C. and the Carolinas.

Martinsville and Henry County Kids Zone (Taylor Carter, Lauren Foster, Roderick Ross and Kayla Cabiness) represented Region II at the national convention in math, science, technology and engineering. They competed against five other regions in the elementary schools division.

Asia Hairston, who placed first in the science fair, also represented Region II at the national convention.