

NEWS RELEASE

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Pictured above are Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer and Trenton High School students after his speech on Careers and Community.

The Trenton High School Heroes Project: Junior Achievement's Full Circle Mentoring Creates Generational Leadership

Trenton, NJ – Marked by a reputation of underachievement and various social stigmas, Trenton High School students are often overlooked and overshadowed by the depravity that plagues the city's once-thriving community. The students, though displaying a sense of apathy for how they are viewed by "outsiders," do look to create a ray of hope for the younger children in their own neighborhoods. Trenton High School students were more than willing to accept the challenge at the top of the 2008-2009 school-year by becoming "JA High School Heroes" a volunteer initiative offered by Junior Achievement (JA), a non-profit that provides volunteer role models who connect with students, to allow high school students to lead hands-on financial literacy games and activities, and expose students to various educational and employment opportunities.

Trenton High School volunteer role models, representing Main Campus, West Campus, and Medical Arts, challenged negative stereotypes by representing the good things the community can do to help itself, teaching the youth. Former JA program participants often recruited their friends or classmates to join in High School Heroes' half-school day activities. Over 190 Trenton High School Heroes taught the JA curriculum to 15 of the 19 Trenton elementary schools and impacted over 2,900 elementary students within the district. In fact, 81 of these students volunteered on multiple occasions at different elementary school sites.

The key benefits of this program are the presentation and hands-on leadership skills that High School Heroes develop, but they also are introduced to various local companies who are looking for new talent. Trenton High School Heroes Sponsors such as Allstate NJ, Tyco, TD Bank, NJM and Janssen Ortho McNeil, would often have passionate professionals meet and greet students at a High School Heroes event to thank the students for their time and also share key career success skills. Not only has this program allowed students to team-build amongst themselves, they have networked with prominent folks in the local business community. In October of 2008, Trenton High School students received a Proclamation for Outstanding Community Service at the NJ State Assembly presented by Assembly Majority Leader Bonnie Watson-Coleman. Over the course of the 2008-2009 school year, they have rubbed elbows with premier business and community leaders like Angela Knight, Diversity Leader of GE Healthcare; Chris Emigholz, Director of Education Policy at NJBIA; Carlos Dominguez, Sr. Vice President -Cisco Systems, Inc.; James Griffin, Senior Communications Consultant for Allstate NJ Insurance Company; Terry McEwen, Director of NJ Department of Banking

and Insurance; Jeanine LaRue, Vice President of Public Affairs at Rutgers University; Dr. Yana Rodgers, Associate Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers University; and Rowena Madden, Director of AmeriCorps and Governor's Office of Volunteerism. This exposure gave the students a glimpse of the wealth of diverse opportunities that are available in various fields of study from a culturally diverse group of people. Moreover, most of the aforementioned individuals hold positions locally and are now readily accessible to the students due to their participation in the High School Heroes program. Even Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer paid a visit to rising High School Heroes at a July summer program to give students words of wisdom on how to improve their community and attain meaningful careers. He told a group of students, "You can be anything you want to be, just choose your friends wisely, and don't accept mediocrity."

When asked what they get out of being involved in High School Heroes, many students weigh-in favorably. TCHS Valedictorian, Tieisha Tift, who will attend Columbia University in the fall in hopes of pursuing a career in social work, said "I didn't think I would be good with kids but they loved me! I learned to love children and not underestimate them. I can loosen up, have fun, and appreciate the insight that children offer." Many students rave about how well they improved their public speaking and their ability to express themselves after participating, but everyone agrees that they are most impressed by the sense of accomplishment they get giving something back to the community. As Jackeline, a 10th grader from Main Campus stated, "From this experience I gained more character...and the satisfaction of knowing at least one kid is looking up to me and wanting to achieve their goals."

Administrators, teachers, volunteers, and participating students all feel that these High School Heroes JA Days are rewarding and necessary. "The students were always anxious for the next one," said Jocelyn White, Business Finance Instructor and JA Champion at TCHS-West campus. "These H.S. Hero days keep getting better and better." A Grant Elementary School teacher concludes, "I admit I was a bit hesitant to have the young persons volunteer in my class at first, but the students were very well-prepared and enthusiastic. My students got a better understanding of their own environment and the appropriate way to operate in it, and the high school volunteers will be ready for the real-world too. At no other time than now is it better to begin financial literacy education, and Junior Achievement provides that and so much more to these kids. It's definitely win-win all the way around."

Junior Achievement is always looking to engage corporate partners and community organizations to provide sponsorship and mentors to continue to expand the High School Heroes program. The focus last year was primarily to bring the program to K-2nd grade classes, but the goal for the program this year will be to reach every K-3rd grade student at all 18 of Trenton's elementary schools. With the addition of the fourth Trenton High School campus, Daylight/Twilight Alternative High School, the larger pool of volunteers will help to facilitate attaining this goal. As Junior Achievement is primarily funded by corporate and foundation dollars, however, lack of funding precipitated by the current state of the economy, always tends to stunt the growth of JA programs statewide. "I would like to see JA being used in every class at every level K-12th grade," says Michael Troutman, the Junior Achievement Program Manager who coordinates High School Heroes events in Trenton on behalf of sponsoring companies. He continues, "If more progressive partners at the local level share resources and support the causes of these young folks and start celebrating their success, then we start creating a cycle of awareness and excitement that only generates more overall social progress." Catherine Milone, President of Junior Achievement of NJ, underscores that sentiment: "There'd be no way we couldn't have a profound impact on all students at every grade level within the district, and the mutual accountability between students and their peers would help to ensure no one's falling through the cracks. As a resident of Trenton, I feel we owe ourselves that much."

About Junior Achievement

Junior Achievement's (JA) mission is to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy. Through a dedicated volunteer network, JA provides in-school and after-school programs for students in grades K-12. JA offers work readiness programs that focus on seven key content areas: business, citizenship, economics, entrepreneurship, ethics/character, financial literacy, and career development. Today JA Worldwide® reaches over 9,300,000 students worldwide in 100 countries. For more information, visit www.ja.org. For information on JANJ, please visit www.janj.org