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VOICES: Group cites stellar volunteers

By The Times-Union

Moss

Elexia Coleman-Moss' volunteer experience with the Duval County Health Department's youth pregnancy prevention program and the YMCA's Black Achievers Program taught her that Duval County teens have disproportionately high rates of underachievement, pregnancy, high school dropouts and involvement in the juvenile justice system.

So she founded Empowerment Resources Inc., a non-profit that administers a program that Coleman-Moss developed and implemented. Even though she has a full-time job, she volunteers as the executive director. She also volunteers with the YMCA Black Achievers Program, and has volunteered with the Duval County Health Department and Jacksonville Community Council Inc.

The program, Journey into Womanhood, addresses the physical, emotional, social and educational needs of teen girls through workshops, mentoring, tutorials and educational field trips. About 20 girls meet biweekly to discuss concerns; attend workshops on career options, preparation for college, academic enhancement, emotional wellness and physical fitness; and take educational field trips.

Coleman-Moss ensures that the young women obtain satisfactory grades and have appropriate conduct at school.

Journey into Womanhood promotes leadership development in girls ages 12-17 and addresses the issues youths face today. The sessions include workshops, field trips and community service projects. Topics for the workshops include character development, educational enrichment, etiquette, money management and abstinence, and there is a parent support group. Some workshops are co-facilitated with community agencies and businesses.

The Math Power! workshop is designed to motivate and build confidence in youths while enhancing math skills. It introduces students to basic and complex math such as numerical operations, word problems, multiplication, division, fractions, square roots, cube roots and algebra by using techniques such as speed, rhythm and repetition.

Coleman-Moss also encourages participants to compete in national and regional competitions. One young woman became the grand-prize winner in the Heirs Inc. Laws of Life Essay contest.

Last year, Coleman-Moss received funds for Journey Into Womanhood from the Jacksonville Children's Commission and the Mayor's Citizen Planning Advisory Committee. She is looking for a permanent home for the organization, preferably somewhere on the Southside where she lives.

Thanks to her tenacity, effective networking and caring heart, the participants of her program will have the hope of a future full of promising opportunities. Coleman-Moss received Volunteer Jacksonville's 2005 Making the Grade Award, presented to an individual who has given extraordinary volunteer service to promote education.

Young at Heart

Southsiders Albert and Viola Russell are quite a team. They provide warmth and comfort by quilting lap robes distributed to assisted living residents and newborns.

Albert and Viola Russell got Volunteer Jacksonville's Young at Heart Award Group Award. Special

The Russells have been quilting lap robes for years, but for the past four years they have volunteered these skills for the non-profit Hope Worldwide.

Albert, 85, and Viola, 84, spend more than 300 hours a year collecting donated material, constructing quilts and involving others in their volunteer craft.

To carry on their volunteer work, they created a venue for people of all ages to come together to construct quilts to give away. The Russells call this their third Saturday program and have involved as many as 15 to 20 people each month. Thanks to the hearts and hands of Albert and Viola, more than 400 quilts have been distributed to warm those in an especially vulnerable time in their lives.

Voices is a column by people and organizations that focuses on the activities and accomplishments of residents in their communities. If you would like to contribute, contact editor Phillip J. Milano at phillip.milano@jacksonville.com or (904) 359-4483.

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The couple received Volunteer Jacksonville's 2005 Young at Heart Award Group Award, given to an outstanding group of volunteers at least 70 years old.

Volunteer Jacksonville serves more than 300 non-profit organizations in Northeast Florida and provides support and assistance to individuals interested in volunteering their time to serve their community. For more information, call 398-7777 or e-mail vj@volunteerjacksonville.org.


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