

Around Annapolis: Seeds 4 Success, Junior League prep girls for college, careers



A group of Junior League of Annapolis volunteers discussed their careers at a Seeds 4 Success Alumnae and College Access family dinner this spring. JLA volunteers pictured from left: Natalie Phillips, Lauren Robinson, Ronicsa Chambers, Michelle DePew, Heather DeBuse, Amanda Clark, Rebekah Sooy, Shelley Hintz and Morgan Van Arsdall. (Photos courtesy of S4S and JLA / HANDOUT)



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Three eighth grade girls will have a very special graduation ceremony this summer.

They will be graduates of Seeds 4 Success's (S4S) Eastport Girls Club (EGC), a program that mentors third- to ninth-grade girls from public and subsidized housing communities. They will move onto S4S's Alumnae and College Access (ACA) program.

The ACA is in its inaugural year and was established by **Rachel Stechschulte** to provide high school girls with academic, social, emotional and college counseling support. There are currently five Annapolis High School girls – three rising juniors and two rising seniors – in the program.

"We are really proud of these girls; they are doing really well in the program and in school," said **John Palinski**, executive director of S4S, a nonprofit that guides children and families living in Annapolis public and subsidized housing to become healthy, successful adults and the umbrella organization for the EGC, ACA, Parent Challenge and I Am a Reader programs.

The ACA program coordinates college campus visits and provides SAT test prep, goal setting and study skills to the girls. Palinski added the program will also provide support to the girls when they are in college.

"Once they're in college, we still plan to be there for them; we'll check in to make sure they are succeeding and even send care packages," he said.

The program will also provide support to those who decide not to go to college.

"We acknowledge that college isn't for everyone, and won't push any student into college and debt if that path is not right for them," Palinski said. "We will work with apprenticeship and workforce development programs and national service opportunities to help insure that all of our kids graduate from high school on a path to a satisfying career and a healthy, successful future."

Supporting and mentoring the girls in the ACA is the Junior League of Annapolis (JLA) who took the nonprofit under its wing as its 2015-2018 project partner.

"The Junior League has been an amazing help to us," said **Alicia O'Brien**, S4S program director. "They not only helped with events; they helped us a lot financially."

During the year, the JLA held six bi-weekly sessions, to share stories about college experiences and careers. Part of the JLA's partnership with the program was to include the family so that they can be more supportive. They held family dinners in the spring where members shared their experiences of sending a child to college. They also had career day in the spring where women discussed and answered questions about their careers.

"We try to provide them with examples of strong, sharp women so that they can have positive role models in their lives who provide mentorship and support in a group setting," said **Julie Pfanstiel**, a litigation paralegal who chairs the JLA ACA committee.

The ACA plans to hold more.

"We are incredibly grateful to JLA for providing the opportunity for the girls to hear about different career options available to them," said **Kate Baker**, the ACA program coordinator, who joined S4S in April. "They lit up with excitement and their eyes were opened to new possibilities."

O'Brien added the family dinners help parents, too.

"This is a challenge for them, too – most of them didn't go to college so they are learning about the process, too," she said. "Having the support from the community is really valuable."

Pfanstiel agrees.

"It's amazing to see that Seeds 4 Success, the girls and their families are just so supportive of each other; they're like a little family in and of themselves," she said.

The JLA is sponsoring 20 individual sessions with an SAT tutor and five SAT group sessions that will begin in the fall. JLA members also took the ACA girls to Pennsylvania to visit Bryn Mawr College and Temple University this year.

"I can't say enough good things about the ACA and the Junior League partnership," said O'Brien. "Junior League ... is sending the girls the message that there are all of these people in the community who are pulling for them and who want to see them succeed."

The program has had an impact on the girls' confidence. Most, who didn't think it was even a possibility to attend college at the beginning of the program, now see it as a viable option.

"Those girls inspire me every day," said O'Brien. "I have no doubt they are all going to do something – they are motivated and they are getting the tools that they need. It's exciting to see them go forward in their lives. I have very high expectations for them."

Teacher wins award for saving rainforest

Over the past 22 years, St. Martin's Lutheran School first grade teacher **Lynn Miller** and her students have saved more than 100 acres of Amazon rain forest. Miller was recently recognized by Gov. **Larry Hogan** with a Governor's Citation for her "significant contributions for more than two decades on behalf of the environment" and her dedicated efforts to educate students about the rainforest.

"She goes above and beyond what most teachers do," said **Lisa Sykes**, who has a son in Miller's class.

When Miller started teaching at the school 22 years ago, she found a rainforest pamphlet left behind by another teacher. That's when she decided to take studying the rain forest to another level. Her first step was to turn her classroom into a rain forest.

Over the years, the project continued to flourish and evolve with student and family involvement. Now every academic subject – from math to art – has a rain forest element. At the end of the year, the unit culminates with a rain forest bake sale, proceeds going to "Earth's Birthday Project," and a Rainforest Day and party.

This year, Miller was surprised at the party when **Mac Love**, deputy director, Governor's Office of Community Initiatives, presented her with the citation.

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