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FAME gives minorities a leg up

By [Kellie B. Gormly](#)
TRIBUNE-REVIEW
Sunday, April 20, 2003

Maurio Medley will graduate in the fall from Kent State University in Ohio with a 4.0 grade-point average, a degree in middle childhood education and experience on the school's football team.

Medley, 22, of the North Side, said he probably wouldn't have been this successful had he not graduated from Shadyside Academy -- and he could not have gone there without the financial aid he received through the Fund for the Advancement of Minorities through Education.

The organization provides need-based scholarships to Pittsburgh-area African-American students in grades 4 through 12 so they can attend one of five independent and pricey private schools: Shadyside Academy and The Ellis School, both in Shadyside; Winchester Thurston, with campuses in Shadyside and Allison Park; St. Edmund's Academy, in Squirrel Hill; and Sewickley Academy.

The organization now sponsors 37 students and hopes to increase that to 50 annually -- 10 for each school, officials said.

On the program

The annual reception and luncheon for the Fund for the Advancement of Minorities through Education, or FAME, is scheduled for noon Wednesday at the Duquesne Club, Downtown. FAME scholars will be introduced to members of the corporate and philanthropic communities. For details, call (412) 441-5600.

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Once students are accepted as FAME scholars -- usually between fourth and eighth grade -- the organization provides annual \$5,000 scholarships for schools whose tuition averages about \$15,000 per year. The balance of the tuition is paid by the parents and the schools themselves, depending on ability, said Lisa Baldwin-Youngblood, executive director of the fund.

The group seeks donations from businesses, foundations, corporations and individuals to help increase Pittsburgh's supply of high-achieving African-American leaders, she said.

"They felt the way to do that was to offer an education to these students who have potential but never had a chance to excel," Baldwin-Youngblood said. "We felt that the first step would be to get them a good education -- not that they couldn't get it someplace else, but here they're guaranteed to get a very good education."

The program's roots can be traced to 1991, when leaders from the five schools got together to discuss ways to diversify their predominantly white student populations, Baldwin-Youngblood said.

Participants in the program say the environment in their prep schools prepares them for higher education -- almost a given for graduates of such schools.

"The atmosphere of a school like (Shadyside) is just amazing -- it's almost like a mini-college," said Medley, who attended a Catholic grade school but could not afford to continue in a private high school. "The teachers are amazing; they'll meet with you and help you."

Indea Herndon, a fund scholar from the Hill District, entered the program in sixth grade and is now a junior at The Ellis School in Shadyside, where she said the nurturing environment has helped sharpen her goals.

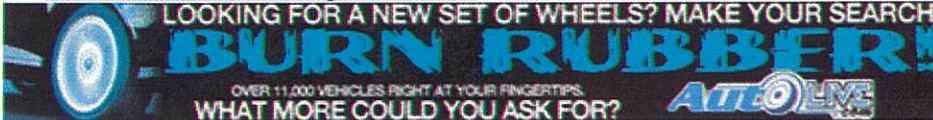
"Everyone knows everyone else," said Herndon, 16, who plans to attend a

Pittsburgh-area college and probably study medicine. "The teachers know you by name, and if you have a problem they are most willing to talk to you about it. It's very reassuring."

Kellie B. Gormly can be reached at kgormly@tribweb.com or (412) 320-7824.

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