

KUDOS

# Winning teen contest brings pride to SSA eighth-grader

**By Nicole Henninger***Staff intern*

It was the sense of accomplishment Jatara McGee received after competing in the Miss Black Teenage Contest that persuaded her to re-enter in following years.

Focused on empowering young, black women for successful careers in their future, the pageant taught Jatara to pass the same insight onto future participants, bringing the mission of the contest full circle.

Jatara, an eighth-grade student at Shady Side Academy, won the Miss Black Teenage contest last month after two years of competing.

Far from a beauty contest, the pageant is more of an 8-week instructional program held on Saturdays to introduce the students to past contestants who have careers in

fields such as medicine and law. The theme is success, and this year, a group of law enforcement employees spoke to the students.

"They have a motto: CAP," Jatara said. "It is confidence in self, awareness in surroundings and pride in all that you do."

From the speakers, the students recognize the opportunities available for them. They are rated on their dress and stage presence but also their knowledge of current events, voice inflection and diction.

"The pageant made her more confident. She is organized, has everything in place and gives everything her best," said Jatara's mother, Brenda McGee.

Just as Jatara learned from her presenters, she is expected to pass on her knowledge and mentorship to the winner of the 10- to 12-year old

**Jatara McGee**

division, the princess of the pageant, Malika Fields.

"I'm looking forward to spending time with the

princess. When I was a princess, the winner was like a big sister to me," Jatara said.

Jatara teaches cheerleading to a local midget football team and vacation Bible school in her spare time.

She is part of an elite cheerleading competition team, the junior level five of the FCA GEMS, the highest level possible to 13-year-old McGee.

She used cheerleading as her talent portion of the contest, which was against 40 other girls.

Jatara said this experience has taught her how to perform in front of a crowd with confidence and personality. Yet with all her accomplishments at such a young age, her humility sets her character apart as she speaks quietly of recent awards such as a 13th placement in a National French contest.

Jatara's parents said her schooling at Shady Side Academy has helped her to become a successful student and member in the community.

"They teach the concept that it takes work to release potential," said the Rev. Dwayne McGee.

Jatara sees her potential as becoming an accomplished actress. She is interested most in drama and hopes to pursue an education in that field in the future.

Jatara is also a skilled writer, and English is her favorite subject at school.

Jatara has competed in the pageant since 2005, when she won Miss Princess. She competed after her older sister Janaye entered the program in 2000.

"I think [the pageant] has made me a better person in the long run," Jatara said.