

Hoop Dreams Hangs it Up



Education

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The D.C. Council honored Susie Kay, founder and president of the Hoop Dreams Scholarship Fund (HDSF), during the Committee of the Whole Legislative meeting on Tue., July 14. The former educator was presented with a ceremonial resolution for her dedication to District youth at the John A. Wilson Building in Northwest.

“The Council recognizes and honors Susie Kay for her love for humanity, her energy, her spirit and dedication to the youth of the District of Columbia,” Councilmember Jack Evans (D-Ward 2) said.

“We hereby declare today, July 14, 2009 to be Susie Kay Day in the District of Columbia,” Evans proclaimed.

The Council’s ceremonial resolution to honor Kay comes three weeks after she announced that the organization, headquartered in Northwest, would close its doors in October due to a lack of funding.

“Unfortunately, in the last few years we had a case of dwindling resources and it became much more difficult to raise the amount of funding that was needed to keep what really makes Hoop Dreams special, which is all of our support programs, continuing to work with the 1,000 students that we sent to college, and being in their lives any way possible,” Kay said.

“With the combination of dwindling resources, adding on more and more students that we work with each year and the downturned economy, a lot of the incredible individuals and corporations that have been able to sustain us financially in the past weren’t really able to do that in the upcoming year,” she said.

While teaching American Government at H.D. Woodson Senior High School in Southeast, Kay said she became frustrated with the fact that her students had the potential and desire to go to college, but lacked the financial support. Kay started the HDSF in 1996 with a 3-on-3 charity basketball tournament to help some of her 12th grade students attend college. The tournament raised \$3,000. Then, she decided to open the HDSF to assist students in five areas that included mentorship, standardized test preparation, career preparation, college scholarship funding and HDSF alumni support.

Kay said that the HDSF has helped 1,000 District students attend college with a total of \$3 million in scholarships awarded. This year, the HDSF awarded scholarships to students who attend Ballou Senior High School in Southeast, H.D. Woodson and the Washington Mathematics, Science and Technology Public Charter School in Northeast.



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Kay said the decision to close the HDSF was difficult, but necessary to maintain the integrity of its mission.

“When we projected out our forecast for Sept. 1, which is the beginning of our fiscal and program year, we had to really make the decision of not risking everything that we’ve done, the integrity of what we’ve done, [and] the impact of what we’ve done. We planned an organized closing that will allow us to keep our commitment to every single student that we’ve worked with this program year and in the past,” Kay said.

Council Chair Vincent Gray expressed his gratitude for Kay’s efforts to help the city’s youth.

“I am delighted to be a part of an enormously deserved recognition of someone who is dynamic, charismatic and magnetic and has established a legacy in the kids who have benefited from this scholarship. What she has done for our city is absolutely unmatched,” Gray said.

Theo Barrum, Kay’s former student, received a \$10,000 scholarship to attend Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1998.

“A lot of students worry about paying for school, but because I had the scholarship, I was able to focus on my studies,” Barrum, 28, said.

When Barrum, a resident of Southeast, returned home from Rutgers University he did so to work for

the HDSF as a program coordinator. Today, Barrum is the organization's program director.

Barrum said that although HDSF is closing, its legacy will continue through the program's alumni community.

"It's up to us to maintain the spirit of the organization," Barrum said. "All of those students who have been helped by Hoop Dreams will affect the future of our communities."

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