

Leon County's youth program a success

BY DAVE HODGES
DEMOCRAT BUSINESS EDITOR

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Having the tools and knowledge to succeed is the key to productive lives for at-risk youngsters, says Larry Thompson, special projects coordinator for Leon County Schools. He has plenty of evidence to cite.

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With the school year ending, the 126 participants in Young Black Male Discovery can look back on important accomplishments. Local companies have stepped up this year to provide resources and volunteers who assist the program.

The students represent each of Leon County's eight middle schools and the Ghazvini Learning Center. Though YBMD began as an after-school session, this was the first year it took up a class period during the day. It emphasizes life skills, looking ahead to the workplace.

"I absolutely know we have made a lot of progress," Thompson said. "We are continuously getting very positive feedback."

The youngsters have learned lessons in character, commitment and why school matters. They recently participated in technology education classes developed by the Go Beyond Foundation LLC, the Tallahassee Technology (TalTech) Alliance and Tallahassee Community College's Division of Technology and Professional Programs, led by Dean Kate Stewart.

There are plans for trips to various companies so the youngsters can see first hand what technology-related industries there are locally. "We are bringing some of these kids an opportunity to see their future," said Allan Stamm, CEO of the Go Beyond Foundation.

And with better school attendance and classroom achievement came better grades. For example, seven of the 19 participants from Swift Creek Middle School made the A&B Honor Roll. YBMD's popular reward is the "report card payday" — all cash — made possible by the United Way of the Big Bend and Wachovia.

The entire Tallahassee of DAG Architects got involved this year in working with the students. "For a number of reasons we felt it was the most logical choice for us," said Chris Robinson, project manager at the firm.

For more information about YBMD, contact Thompson at (850) 487-7173 or ThompsonL3@leon.k12.fl.us.