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## Mentorship Program Encourages Student Interns to Elevate their GAME

By ROSETTA RILEY

This summer, a group of Compton High School students are elevating their game—and not by practicing their jump shots. The Elevate Your G.A.M.E. (EYG) after-school mentoring program not only expects students to improve their grades, attendance, maturity and empowerment (G.A.M.E), but also encourages them to participate in summer internships with local companies.

The EYG program, a nonprofit organization, was co-founded in 2002 by Gipson Lyles, a former Compton High School principal, and Michael Freeman, an alumnus of Compton High. Their vision was to create a program that enables students to achieve self-esteem in and out of the classroom.

Students who attend the after-school program are required to recite an affirmation statement letting them know they are “fearfully and wonderfully made” and are “created to achieve great things in this world.” They then discuss with their mentors the importance of integrity, relationships, career planning and compassion.

Such sessions are changing the lives of Compton youth.

Christian Hall, 17, a recent graduate of Compton High, admits to ditching class prior to attending the program. It was during her freshman year that her EYG mentor explained the importance of prioritizing grades before friends.

“The program taught me how to mature in a lot of ways,” Hall said.

Starting in the program as a freshman with below average grades, Hall was encouraged to receive tutoring and increased her grade point average to a 3.0 by graduation. Hall now works in the summer internship and will be attending Central State University in Ohio this fall. There she plans on studying political science.

Though Compton High School is the birthplace of EYG, now six years later, the program serves more than 200



ELEVATE YOUR G.A.M.E.—Elevate your G.A.M.E (grades, attendance, maturity and empowerment) participants have the opportunity to complete an internship with community businesses and leaders. The program attempts to provide students with work experience while encouraging them to make excellent grades in school. It operates in various schools. Pictured (top left, l to r): Dr. Wendy Parker-Harris, a dentist who owns the Wendy Parker-Harris, D.D.S. office in Lakewood, is all smiles with intern Xia Williams. Also pictured (bottom left, l to r): Intern Chavez Bell strikes a pose with Judge Kelvin Filer in Filer's chambers at the Compton Courthouse.

youth at several locations, including Walton Middle School, **Northpointe Apartments** in north Long Beach and Harbor Teacher Preparatory High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

The program developed internships after its first year. Freeman, director of EYG, burdened over the lack of ambition he saw among high school students, sought to create an internship project.

“Many of the young men at Compton High would tell me that they were going to play in the NBA (National Basketball Association) or NFL (National Football League)...I would explain the astronomical odds and ask them about their back up plans,” he said.

The young men replied to Freeman with blank stares and shrugged shoulders. “It was then I realized the need to expose our kids in the urban community to firsthand career opportunities.”

More than 40 students this summer, are participating in summer internship opportunities from local businesses that include Compton Courthouse, Compton Fire Department, law office of Luz Herrera, Xerox Corporation, dental office of Dr. Wendy Parker-Harris, PETCO, Roadstarr Motorsports, Public Defenders’ office at Los Angeles Courthouse, Valassis, Willowbrook Library, Center for Community & Family Services, Community Legal Services and Bank of America. The internships are three to six weeks and offer students stipends that are funded through fundraising events and business donations.

Prior to placing students with local companies, EYG prepares students working in professional environments.

“They taught us gentlemen etiquette, using professional language and interviewing skills; things you will really use in the real world,” said Steve McIntosh, an EYG alumnus.

McIntosh, who graduated in 2006, now attends California State University, Sacramento and is majoring in English. He said his first internship with Xerox taught him to be obedient, but the most rewarding aspects of EYG were the relationships he formed.

“The mentors are what make EYG special,” he said. “You could trust (them) even if you did something wrong.”

Though the volunteering mentors are essential to EYG, they are also the toughest to maintain, according to Freeman, who is currently in the midst of recruiting committed mentors. Freeman anticipates the Compton High site to begin emulating other EYG sites by offering peer mentoring in the future. For Freeman, the program is an extension of his ministry and his ultimate goal is to establish EYG as an indirect “catalyst for launching a movement of peer mentoring in every high school in the nation.”

For more information about the EYG program, visit [www.elevateyourgame.org](http://www.elevateyourgame.org).