

Education Today

Looking at education through the purposeful lens of Jada Pinkett Smith

By MISANI

Special to the AmNews

Jada Pinkett Smith is a strong advocate of education. In fact, the wife/mother/business woman/author/philanthropist is such a staunch supporter of learning that she and her actor/rapper/producer husband, Will Smith, have their own school. Located in Calabasas, California, New Village Leadership Academy (NVLA) is a private

elementary school of about 61 students.

"It's more of a boutique [type of school]," said Pinkett Smith, who is also a celebrated actress/director/producer. "I want to keep it more of a boutique education for us to keep the student ratio way down, because I look at teachers more as mentors than as your teachers in the conventional sense." As such, according to Pinkett Smith,

the teachers at NVLA are people who keep a child inspired. They are also guides who the students can be inspired by and with whom they can maintain a close educator/student relationship.

"We've had it [the school] for 5-6 years, but this is the first year, we've actually taken it public," states Pinkett Smith, the author of an empowerment book for girls



Jada Pinkett Smith

titled, "Girls Hold Up This World" (Cartwheel, 2004).

Initially, the Smiths home-schooled their two children, Jaden and Willow, two professional actors who now attend NVLA. However, when they are working on a film, they are tutored on the set.

Pinkett Smith is excited about the various accomplishments of the students at
(Continued on Page 44)

Chris and Malaak Rock: a library grows in Bushwick

By JOHN BRODEUR

Special to the AmNews

Last Wednesday (November 12), Chris and Malaak Rock, Major George Hood of the Salvation Army, representatives from Minneapolis-based retail chain Target and more than 100 children were on hand at the Salvation Army Bushwick Community Center to witness the unveiling of the center's newly renovated library.

Target partnered with the Rocks last December to hold a private shopping event for 175 children in need at the Brooklyn Target store, giving each of the children a \$250 gift card to spend on toys and gifts. Following that, Target awarded a \$100,000 grant to the Bushwick Community Center to be put toward ren-



Malaak and Chris read to kids in the center's newly renovated library.

ovating its library.

Designed pro bono by architect Rodney Leon of AARRIS Architects, LLP, the library, located at 1151 Bushwick Avenue, boasts new books, furniture, carpet and paint, as well as a number of new Dell (Product) Red

computers, donated by the Dell company.

At Wednesday's press conference, Chris Rock recalled coming to the center as a child to play "pool, basketball, that game with the little soccer guys" and other activities. Also during the conference, it was revealed that some of the grant money was used to make improvements to

the center's gymnasium.

Wednesday's event also served as an announcement that Target would donate \$1 million to the Salvation Army. Each of the organization's 40 divisions will receive \$25,000 to improve one library, media center or edu-



Chris Rock greets folks from the community

(John Brodeur photos)

cational facility of their choosing. The recipients will be announced in January 2009.

Said Target community relations representative Laysha

Ward, "Children are the heart and soul of our communities, and we want to ensure they have the resources they need to be successful in life."

Helping youth 'Make the Grade'

By KAYLYN KENDALL DINES

Special to the AmNews

As a child growing up in Queensbridge, Bob Lee hoped to become a boxer and a DJ. Lee, the community affairs director at 107.5 WBLS-FM in Manhattan, has had success in both areas. His ongoing mission involves helping youth develop and fulfill their academic and professional dreams.

Lee, the founder and CEO of Make the Grade Foundation, Inc., is hosting a fundraiser to support the non-profit organization's tutoring, mentoring and academic enrichment programs for youth. On Thursday, November 20, at 6:30 p.m., the third annual Make the Grade Awards dinner dance will be held at Penthouse Live at Terrace on the Park in Flushing Meadow Park, Queens. Celebrities are

expected to attend the event honoring Karen Alford, vice president of elementary schools, United Federation of Teachers; Steven L. Boyd, senior vice president of sales and marketing at Coca-Cola North America; Mark Wager, president of Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield and Charles R. Warfield, Jr., president and chief operating officer of ICBC Broadcast Holdings, Inc, WBLS-FM/WLIB-FM.

While the organization was established in 2004 due to a collaborative effort between parents and leaders in diverse industries, Lee has consistently mentored and encouraged youth for about 25 years. He has found his purpose in life, he said. "Helping others get what they need in life helps to fulfill your purpose in life." Even after the fundraiser is complete, donations will still

be accepted.

"We wanted to focus on [young] people who are not highly motivated so they can bring their grades from D to C, C to B and so on," said Lee, whose public speaking schedule includes stopping by schools to encourage children.

Years ago, as an aspiring boxer, he learned one of his greatest lessons. He had a winning record, but he realized discipline was essential. "You have to prepare before you get there," he said with enthusiasm. He frequently shares that message with youth and explains how discipline impacts them. Another popular message is, "What you are is God's gift to you and what you make of yourself is your gift to God. So choose your choice and let your choice control the chooser. I am Dr. Bob

Lee of WBLS."

His passion is shared by distinguished Make the Grade Foundation board members, including journalist Ann Tripp, also of WBLS-FM and the nationally syndicated "The Steve Harvey Morning Show."

Tripp attributed the following statement to Rev. Al Sharpton: "Young people are 60 percent of our present and 100 percent of our future," she said while paraphrasing the comment that continues to resonate with her. She participates in panel discussions and, like Harvey, she has participated in the organization's career shadowing program. Tripp noticed that some of the youth seem surprised when they "see people, especially people who are semi-visual" genuinely care about them. She not only feels a responsibility to nur-

ture youth, but she acts on it.

Gwendolyn Primus, a family and community partnership specialist with Turnaround for Children, Inc., appreciates Make the Grade's outreach efforts. She has invited Lee to speak at several public schools, including three middle schools in the Bronx. The students listen, they want to take pictures with him and, ultimately, they want him to return.

According to Primus, whether Lee is describing appropriate behavior or attire, he connects with the students. "They listen. It's not somebody talking at them. He talks to them," she said before adding, "He not only captivates the adults, but he also captivates the students. When he talks to them, it's like they relate to him and nobody else is in the room. It has an impact."