

## Five honored as African-American achievers for bettering lives of youths

Tuesday, 28 March 2006

By Gregory Lewis

South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Posted March 28 2006

This year's JM Family Enterprises African-American Achievers have helping children in common. Tony Thompson shows disadvantaged kids how to discover the talented artists inside of them. C. Ron Allen runs a youth mentorship program in Delray Beach. Levi G. Williams has improved the quality of education for lower-income minority students throughout Broward County. Benjamin Williams has spent 45 years in the field of education. Alycia LaFavor, a senior at Stranahan High School, found time to help elementary school children improve their reading skills.

They will all be recognized Thursday at the 14th annual African-American Achievers Awards ceremony and reception at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale.

"These honorees are all special people who make a real difference in our communities," said Jim Moran, JM Family Enterprises Founder and honorary chairman. "Through their many efforts, they have touched all of our lives."

Thompson, the arts and culture honoree, is artistic director of the Metropolitan Diversity Theater. He is an accomplished actor and director for more than 40 years.

Thompson, of Fort Lauderdale, founded the African-American Children's Theater Workshop, which helps disadvantaged children discover their artistic skills. He also is chairman of Ancestral Legacies, a nonprofit organization that creates awareness of the importance of African heritage.

"I encourage parents to expose their kids to the arts," Thompson said. "It changes their lives in many ways without them even knowing."

Allen, a reporter for the South Florida Sun-Sentinel since 1987, is the community service honoree for his efforts to save at-risk children.

He founded a character-building mentorship program for boys in 1991 because he was tired of seeing youths caught up in the legal system for what he calls "stupid things" that could have been avoided had there been an adult male in their lives.

The Knights of Pythagoras is designed to foster leadership, academic success and civic-mindedness in youth ages 7 to 17. Allen, of Delray Beach, also gives a \$500 college scholarship to a deserving high school senior every year.

That attracted the attention of Gov. Jeb Bush, who earlier this year gave Allen a Point of Light Award.

"All they need is someone to show them some love," Allen said.

"I challenge every man out there to give three hours on one Saturday. That's all we ask. It makes a big difference."

Business and entrepreneurial honoree Levi G. Williams has fought for diversity and social justice for more than a decade through his law practice. His dedication and ongoing efforts have helped increase the number of minority state attorneys in Florida and improved the quality of education for lower-income minority students in Broward County, according to the Achievers Awards selection committee.

"It is incumbent on those who have been blessed to be in a position to help others that we do so for the betterment of the community," Williams said. "Power is useless unless you use it for good."

Education honoree Benjamin Williams, of Fort Lauderdale, has spent 45 years in the field of education, all of it in Broward County. He is the chairman of the Broward County School Board.

Williams has spearheaded numerous innovative learning programs and helped transform Broward County high schools into state-of-the-art facilities. His goal is to improve student achievement, he said.

"I have always tried to do what we think is best for students," Williams said. "I want to continue to stimulate and motivate students so they will stimulate and motivate themselves."

LaFavor is the recipient of the Jerome Edmund Gray Youth Achiever Award. She is an honor student in the top 20 percent of her class, secretary of her school's chapter of the National Honor Society and always finds time to help others.

"I usually like to encourage others," she said. "I haven't done everything right. But I like to encourage others to accomplish things."

LaFavor said winning the award "means more than recognition. It makes me feel like I have accomplished something." She will attend Florida State University and wants to become a psychologist.

JM will donate \$20,000, \$5,000 in each of the adult achiever's names to the charity or charities of his or her choice.

The Youth Achiever receives a need-based four-year scholarship to FSU.

Gregory Lewis can be reached at [glewis@sun-sentinel.com](mailto:glewis@sun-sentinel.com) or 954-356-4203.