

IN THE NEWS

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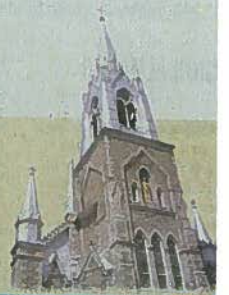
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SECTION E

ACCENT > FAITH & VALUES

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31, 2009



BRADENTON.COM

A BOUNTIFUL BREAKFAST



PHOTO BY [unreadable]

Liliana Ibarra of Lakewood Ranch High School has received a college scholarship through the Take Stock in Children program.

'Take Stock in Children' awards scholarships at annual event

By WENDY DANLE
Special to the Herald

Liliana Ibarra, the 17-year-old daughter of a migrant farm worker, is working hard at school so hopefully one day she can get out of the farm fields and become a lawyer.

And with the help of a college scholarship through Take Stock in Children of Manatee County, she will have that opportunity.

"It's made me very happy to get the scholarship," said Ibarra. "This is a great chance for me. I'm doing things I don't know if I would have been able to do."

On Feb. 5, community and religious leaders will gather for the second Leadership Prayer Breakfast at the Renaissance on 9th senior center to benefit Take Stock in Children.

Take Stock in Children is



a statewide scholarship and mentoring program that helps children like Ibarra, who have dreams of going to col-

If you go

What: Second Leadership Prayer Breakfast for Take Stock in Children with guest speaker tennis legend and IMG Academies president Nick Bollettieri

When: 7:30 a.m. Thursday

Where: Renaissance on 9th, 1816 Ninth St. W., Bradenton

Tickets: \$25
Information or tickets: 751-7012 ext. 2047 or visit www.takestockmanatee.com or www.takestockinchildren.com

lege but because of life's circumstances, do not have the means.

"We want to bring leaders together that serve the same community and give them an opportunity to develop relationships," said Diana Dill,

program director for Take Stock in Children.

Modeled after the National Prayer Breakfast held in Washington, D.C., in which every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower has participated, organizers hope to enlighten community leaders about Take Stock in Children, and in turn, inspire them to help low-income, at-risk students achieve their dreams.

"It gives leaders an opportunity to come together and pursue a common goal," said Dill. "We're serving the same children and the same community."

Take Stock in Children in Manatee County started about 12 years ago, according to Dill. The first year, the program awarded two scholarships; one to a boy and one to a girl. "American Idol" finalist Sye-sha Mercado was the first girl

ever to receive a scholarship through the program.

"It's really a wonderful way for a student to earn a college degree," said Dill. "It helps relieve some of the stress for the student about how they are going to afford college."

Scholarship money is raised through grants, donations and fund raisers, said Dill. The Florida Prepaid Scholarship Foundation matches funds raised, making it possible for Take Stock in Children to serve a greater number of students.

The program already has helped 150 students achieve the dream of going to college. Another 150 middle and high school children are enrolled in the program, with 41 of them joining this past fall. About 25 to 30 more students are expected to enter the program

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“These children need a prayer. We need to be praying for these children and hoping their lives can be better.”

Diana Dill, program director for Take Stock in Children

BREAKFAST FROM 1E

this spring, said Dill.

In order to qualify for a \$10,000 Take Stock in Children college scholarship through the Florida Prepaid College program, a child must have financial hardship and be in sixth grade through ninth grade, said Dill.

Most of the children who qualify for the scholarship program, also qualify for free and reduced school lunches, said Dill. More often than not, they come from challenging backgrounds with unique family situations, she said.

“They are deciding so many things before they should,” said Dill. “These children need a prayer. We need to be praying for these children and hoping their lives can be better.”

Once accepted, the student signs an agreement, and must stay drug free, crime free, and maintain good grades until graduation from high school, said Dill. They meet with a mentor every week for 30 minutes.

Take Stock in Children has a 96 percent success rate for getting children through high school and into college, according to Dill.

“It’s very successful,” she said. “We only lose about one child per year.”

The prayer breakfast hopes to be a “mentor-raiser” as well as a fundraiser, with organizers hoping it will motivate attendees to think about giving not just money, but their time, said Dill. Mentors are a big part of the program’s success, she said.

“We need mentors to encourage a student and keep them on track,” said Dill. “What a difference they make in a child’s life.”

Students face challenges unlike generations before, and need a little extra support, said John Murrell, a former school resource officer and now a Take Stock mentor. He spends an hour a week helping a Harlee Middle

School student enrolled in the scholarship program. He offers an extra ear when the student has academic problems or peer pressure issues.

“I point him in a different direction when he faces challenges and help him make the right choices,” said Murrell, now a Manatee Sheriff’s lieutenant. “It’s all about making the right choices.”

Murrell works hard to help keep him focused on school, when the student sometimes is distracted.

“I monitor where he’s at and where he needs to be,” said Murrell. “When I see areas where he’s falling short, I can talk to the teachers and get him back on track.”

Joshua Senften, 16, a junior at Braden River High School who has been in the program for about three years, appreciates the mentoring. It gives a student someone to talk to no matter what the situation is, and makes a difference in life-changing decisions, he said.

“If I have trouble with anything, I talk to him,” said Senften, who hopes to major in music education after he graduates high school.

Through weekly meetings, mentor Katie Klomp shares her experiences and lends an extra ear, but also stresses to Ibarra that education will be her way out of the farm fields.

“I think it helped expand her world,” said Klomp. “It helps her to see that she can be something more, that she doesn’t have to be a migrant worker.”

Ibarra, a junior at Lakewood Ranch High School, travels with her family from Florida to Michigan each year to pick vegetables. She returns to Florida just after the school year begins, yet continues to take honors classes and maintains a 4.25 grade point average, said Klomp.

Klomp complimented Ibarra’s dedication to her school work and motivation to complete the

Take Stock program to receive her scholarship.

“She’s brilliant and she’s got a great attitude,” said Klomp. “Not only is she taking the hardest classes and maintaining good grades, she has to make up classes each year.”

Both Ibarra and Senften are participating in the Leadership Prayer Breakfast. Ibarra will lead attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance. Senften will be playing tunes with a jazz combo.

Dill said the Take Stock in Children program does more than just send children to college; it helps change children’s lives.

“I think this program lets a child believe in themselves,” she said. “Life can be tough and sometimes we need someone to see the greatness in us. We help good kids become great.”