

Oprah's tea to aid Bowman

BY ANTHONY KADARRELL THIGPEN

Post-Tribune correspondent

GARY — An unexpected gift from Oprah Winfrey has given Thea Bowman Leadership Academy officials and students who are in the Pathways to College program reason to celebrate.

Winfrey recently announced that Pathways to College, an after-school program that aims to help students in struggling school districts get to college and earn degrees, will be among the organizations to benefit from sales of her new tea, according to Starbucks' website and Pathways to College president and founder Judith Griffin.

During Starbucks' annual shareholders meeting last month in Seattle, Winfrey acknowledged the national success of Pathways to College.

Teavana Oprah Chai Tea will be sold at Starbucks and Teavana stores across the United States and Canada starting April 29, according to starbucks.com. Pathways to College is one of four nonprofits supporting urban education that will benefit from contributions from sales.

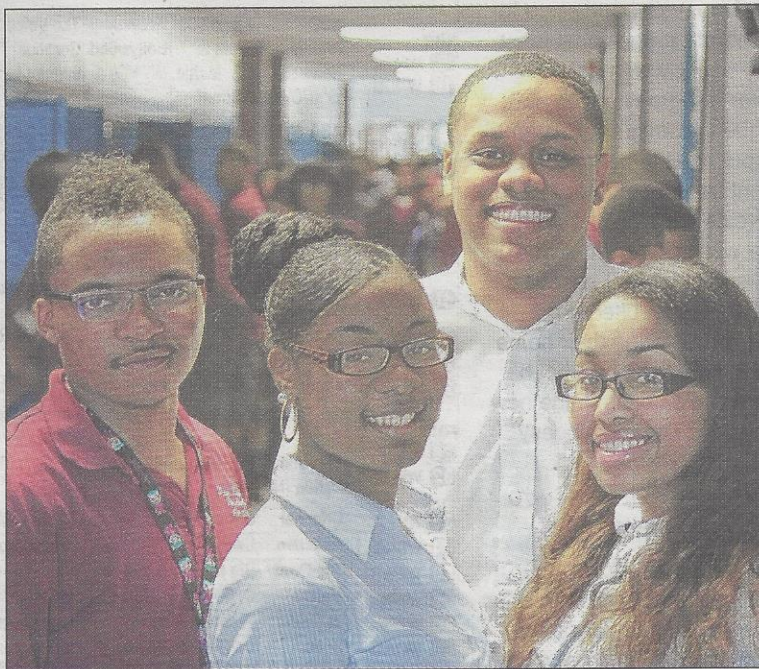
"This will allow us to do more of what we are already doing," Griffin said.

She said that each year 100 percent of students involved in Pathways to College receive at least one college acceptance letter. Together, these students earn \$2 million to \$4 million in scholarships.

Up to 100 Pathway scholars are selected at high schools in struggling districts, and they are mentored by three to five teachers after school. Schools usually pay \$120,000 to Pathways to College to offset expenses that include taking students on tours of college campuses. But with a limited budget, the administration of Thea Bowman and Pathways to College agreed to a program with 30 students.

"The goal is to go into school districts that do not have a lot of resources," Griffin said. "Systemic change is possible, and high school is not too late to start."

Pathways to College previously offered its services to Gary Community Schools Corp. under its previous administration but was turned



Thea Bowman Leadership Academy students Marcus Johnson (from left), Michelle Phillips, Christopher Reed and Katera McDuffie are four of 30 Pathway scholars. They say their school is not just about a good basketball program. Oprah Winfrey's pledge to the Pathways to College youth organization gave students a stronger sense of hope to achieve more academically. | ANTHONY KADARRELL THIGPEN-FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

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JUDITH GRIFFIN,
Pathways to College president/founder

down by the school board.

Gary Community Schools Corp. Supt. Cheryl Pruitt said she is revisiting the budget with hopes to offer public school students the same advantages as Thea Bowman, a charter school, to prepare them for college. The board has two new members, and Pruitt and Griffin have talked about a second chance at board approval for the program.

Meanwhile, Thea Bowman students are positioned for success.

The Pathways to College curriculum creates a network of peers who encourage and inspire one another to succeed, officials said.

"The fastest way to change a school is to get the students to do

it," Pathways senior advisor Gregory Prince said. "Reform in America is usually top-down; we have a bottom-up program."

Pathway scholars are expected to change the atmosphere the entire school. Prince said students are eager to be part of the process.

Gary Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson welcomes Winfrey's support.

"We are beyond excited that Ms. Winfrey has pledged her support to a program that will directly impact youth in Gary. We will continue to work on Gary's revitalization every day," said Freeman-Wilson, also hopeful after President Barack Obama made Gary a "promise zone" to help the community fight poverty and assist children.

Winfrey is a longtime supporter of Pathways to College, having also made possible the publication "Pathways to College: An Explorer's Guide." The college preparation guidebook is helping Thea Bowman's Pathway scholars prepare for a world of unlimited possibilities.

"The proceeds from Oprah Chai Tea will give us another great opportunity," Griffin said.



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Why would we need an immigration detention center? The illegals are our friends. How can we buy their votes if they are detained?

If congressmen feel they are underpaid, they should get a part-time job at Wal-Mart or McDonald's just like real people do.

Parking lots should have larger spaces for people with big cars. I'm tired of parking lots downsizing their parking spaces.

Just look out as you drive, and everywhere you look are loads of just plain litter. What are we becoming?

The reason the GOP has no chance of winning is because they all operate on the right-wing talk-radio level. It's all anger and stupidity, all the time.

Today's religious leaders are quite vocal about how they choose to interpret the Bible. I am so grateful that I am open-minded enough to not belong to any of their cults.

I want to give thanks to those who stood their ground and passed the Indiana Right to Work jobs bill. It has been a savior to my family that such good jobs were created and enticed us to move from Rockford to take one of these jobs. It literally saved our life.