

August 22, 2011

## College connection's big night

*By Larry Muhammad*

Growing up in public housing, Courtney Phelps didn't see a college education in his future.

"Single-parent, low-income household, grew up in the Georgetown housing project near Shively, known for crime, drugs and violence," said Phelps, 25, "and no one in my family had attended college."

But the duPont Manual High School graduate went on to Howard University in Washington, D.C., and in June received his law degree from the University of Louisville Louis D. Brandeis School of Law — thanks to the Lincoln Foundation's Whitney Young Scholars Program.

"I started when I was in eighth grade, and at Lincoln Foundation I learned about the entire collegiate process," Phelps said. "Every summer for two weeks, students visit college campuses, staying overnight, living in dorms — it's a complete pre-college experience. In fact, I learned about Howard University in the Whitney Young Scholars Program. That's what put me on the path to academic success."

Saturday night, supporters of the Lincoln Foundation will gather at the Kentucky Center for its key fundraiser, "Evening of Jazz," this year featuring recording artist Vanessa Rubin.

The evening benefits the Scholars program, which guides students academically for six years through enrollment in college with a series of bimonthly clinics during the school year that teach critical thinking, math and science proficiency, and character-building exercises.

"Lincoln Foundation's job is that of saving young people by providing educational enrichment," said the organization's president, Larry McDonald. "We are committed to holistic development of students, and have a phenomenal track record because the culture of the Whitney Young Scholars program fosters preparation and academic achievement."

Named for a former president of the Lincoln Institute, the foundation's forerunner, the Whitney Young Scholars Program also helps students get scholarships and financial assistance during their college years.

The Lincoln Foundation was established in 1910. It once managed the finances of the Lincoln Institute, the Shelby County-based boarding school for African-American students that was created by trustees of Berea College after the Kentucky legislature outlawed integrated education in 1904.

The institute closed in 1970, but the foundation continues its tradition of educating less fortunate youngsters.

During the "Evening of Jazz," the foundation presents its Spirit of Excellence Award to people exemplifying the organization's commitment to education, community service and leadership. Previous recipients include entrepreneurs Wade and Alice Houston; Kevin Cosby, pastor of St. Stephen Church; and Lonnie and Muhammad Ali.

This year's recipient is Mary Gwen Wheeler, interim director of 55,000 Degrees, Metro Louisville's higher-education initiative.

"It's an honor and very meaningful to me to be recognized by an organization with such a history and legacy of improving outcomes and opportunities for some of our most disadvantaged students," said Wheeler, a Yale graduate, former vice president of the National Center for Family Literacy, and a member of the state Board of Education.

"And what's really great about the Lincoln Foundation is that they understand that education, that going to college, is the ticket to improved livelihood and quality of life," Wheeler said. "And they know that it takes investment over time. ... It's a thrill to be recognized by them and receive this amazing award."

## Additional Facts

16th Annual 'Evening of Jazz'

**When:** Saturday at 7 p.m.; reception begins at 5:30.

**Where:** The Kentucky Center, 501 W. Main St.

**Cost:** \$50.

**Tickets and info:** Call (502) 585-4733 or (502) 585-4733; or go to [www.lincolnfdn.org](http://www.lincolnfdn.org) or [www.kentuckycenter.org](http://www.kentuckycenter.org).

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