

# Harriet Elizabeth Brown program gaining steam

Aug 10, 2018

The newly established, grassroots-inspired Harriet Elizabeth Brown Scholars Program reached a major milestone June 4 when it awarded its first-ever scholarships at the Calvert Local Scholarship Application Celebration June 4 at the College of Southern Maryland's Prince Frederick Campus.

Calvert High School graduates Wilbur Robinson (Class of 2016) and Desmond Creek (2017) each received funding to further their education and help launch the first-year pilot effort.

"We know there are fewer role models in our classrooms for students of color, as greater segments of the community are increasingly being underrepresented on our school staff," said Elder Henderson Benjamin of the Calvert County Baptist Church, a coordinator for the new program. "We see this effort as an expanding opportunity for our middle schoolers to be mentored into becoming our next generation of community leaders."

Community has been the centerpiece of the evolving program, beginning with the 2017 Citizens Advisory Committee to the Board of Education's recommendation to the board. In August 2017, the Citizens Advisory Committee had just completed a two-year study into some of the reasons for the continued decline of staff diversity in local schools.

"The Citizens Advisory Committee has always taken on tough issues such as the problems of minority retention and recruitment, and that's why this student-to-teacher pipeline recommendation rose to the top," Citizens Advisory Committee Chairperson J.C. Hooker said in a



Representing scholarship provider "Friends of the Harriet Elizabeth Brown Scholars Program," Remnant Center of Excellence CEO and Colonel (ret.) Will Wiggins, center, presents the program's first two scholarships to Calvert High School graduates Wilbur Robinson, left, and Desmond Creek, at the Calvert Local Scholarship Application Celebration held June 4, at the College of Southern Maryland's Prince Frederick campus.

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press release. "It's our job to give the board not only a community research tool, but to provide thoughtful recommendations on the assigned topic that we studied during the school year."

After months of community collaboration and planning, the recommended student-to-teacher pipeline began to take shape, and it reached another milestone when program coordinators traveled to Winthrop College in South Carolina in late June for two days of exclusive educational training in



Madison Brown, a cousin of Harriet Elizabeth Brown, holds her commemorative portrait during the 2017 unveiling at the Task Force to Study the Commemoration of Harriet Elizabeth Brown Recognition Ceremony at Calvert County Courthouse.

## SUBMITTED PHOTOS

a curriculum designed specifically for the program's middle school scholars. The pipeline, which has now become known simply as the HEB in honor of Harriet Elizabeth Brown, debuts in the fall with a full complement of tools to advance learning in education, leadership, business, and technology & science.

(SEE PAGE TWO- STEAM)

## page 2- STEAM

In the press release, Margaret Dunkle, who is the chair of the Task Force to Study the Commemoration of Harriet Elizabeth Brown, and a former chair of the Commission for Women in Calvert County, applauded the effort and told the program to “keep up your great work. The HEB (award) was lovely.”

The Big Conversation Partners for Dismantling Racism and Privilege and HEB recently became mutual partners to support each other’s efforts in advancing diversity and dismantling racism.

“We need more positive efforts like the HEB to help correct problems of racial imbalance,” said Diane Davies, chair for the Big Conversation, a community dialogue and exchange on tough topics and a member of Middleham and St. Peter’s Parish in Lusby.

And, as a “Friend of the Harriet Elizabeth Brown Scholars Program,” the Big Conversation joins a number of community associations, businesses and individuals supporting the HEB.

While the HEB has received considerable input and encouragement from across the

community, a core group has been most impactful in building it. That list includes educational professionals, both at the college and high school levels, who have helped craft the vision and mission statements.

For its mentoring needs, the Calvert County Mentoring Partnership has provided the full complement of its resources. Calvert County Baptist Church gave it a home by generously offering space. Tau Lambda Lambda, the local chapter of the Omega Phi Psi Fraternity, agreed to handle all the STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) activities and the Concerned Black Women offered guidance and direction. In addition, Remnant Center of Excellence will handle much of the administrative scheduling and graphics.

“Building the HEB reflects the legacy of its namesake, who was fearless in trying to correct what she believed was a wrong and her continued fight to see change happen,” Dunkle said of Harriet Elizabeth Brown.

“The 15-year erosion of diversity in our schools is a concern on many levels, as each day there are few to no role models in our classrooms for a significant number of students,” said Will Wiggins of Remnant, who added

that number is close to 30 percent.

In the press release, Wiggins went on to say that a recent Johns Hopkins University research report revealed that just one black instructor (in grades 3 to 5) can have an enormously positive impact on minority students. After studying 100,000 students in Tennessee and North Carolina over a 12-year span, the university concluded that having a black instructor in those early grades markedly lifted students’ academic trajectory. All low-income students benefitted and African-American males in that group had the greatest improvement, elevating their trajectory to finish high school by close to 30 percent.

“That is a metric we can not only use in Calvert, but all across America,” Wiggins said. “And, while the HEB has achieved significant milestones, we must be compelled to have our schools reflect the community in which they exist, so all students benefit from having classroom role models.”

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