

Midway councilwoman wants educational improvements

By Sandi Beare
Herald Correspondent

New Midway councilwoman Quintealia Cato asked residents of Gadsden County to look at potential ways to improve the educational environment in schools at a meeting at City Hall last Tuesday evening. "While it is impossible to guarantee that any single action will lead us to this goal, we are certain of the results of failing to take any action. It is my hope that our meeting, combined with efforts already underway, will change the present path and blaze a new trail for our students," said Cato's printed opening statement.

Two programs were presented at the meeting; Galaxy Classroom, a Best Practices Network initiative for elementary students, and CollegeEd, a middle and high school college and career planning program. Each helps students make the right choices in learning and selecting from an array of resources to succeed in their educational path.

Fredrick Hicks, formerly a project manager and process improvement coordinator for the Florida Department of Children and Families, served as facilitator and introduced the two programs' speakers. "When FCAT scores were released a couple of weeks ago, Quintealia Cato called and asked for help. I teach at FAMU as an adjunct (professor) and have an acute interest in Gadsden County," said Hicks.

Bernie Rice of Best Practices Network said he got his start in educational software through his association with IBM. Rice was in senior management with the firm for 25 years, serving as CFO of the southern region and vice president of business development. After tenures with Edmark and Riverdeep, both successful IBM subsidiary developers of innovative edu-

cational software for children, he formed his own company.

Galaxy Classroom helps teachers and students, Rice said. "(They) learn math, reading, writing, and collaboration skills by participating in the science experiments, discoveries, and in-class and online science learning community," states a Galaxy white paper.

"It doesn't get any better than working with passionate (education) leaders like here. (School superintendent) Reginald James says he wants to help teachers teach and students learn. My role is to help them with that execution," said Rice. "How can we put our finger on (just) one thing to turn around public education? The message is that the United States is lost in space, especially in mathematics and science," he said.

Rice said 21st century jobs will require expertise in science. "We've built partner-

ships with NASA and the National Science Institute," said Rice, adding that Broward and Miami-Dade schools will soon be using the Galaxy system.

Jesus Jara is director of the Florida Partnership, a collaborative initiative sponsored by the Florida Department of Education. A former principal, he presented the CollegeEd program.

"In 2004, the legislature created Florida Partnership (to ensure) equity and access into college for all students. The state has already paid for these programs, (but) we're still fighting with principals to get this into some schools," Jara said.

Jara said the extra initiatives can't start in high school, but must begin early in a child's education. "Best Practices Network starts in elementary schools, we start in middle schools," he said.

Yasmeen Leon, a former Gadsden biology teacher who was in the first cadre of school ratings, is also working with the CollegeEd program. "Gadsden County is the best-kept secret in Florida. I know what our kids can do. I know their potential," said Leon. Leon was Gadsden County teacher of the year 2005-2006.

Reverend Charles Burney hosts a television show on WCTV Thursday evenings, working with Gadsden County Sheriff Morris Young and Superintendent Reginald James to address issues with the kids who fall out of the system. Burney said there's frustration in many people who saw schools doing relatively well last year, do poorly in science this year. "When we talk about tests, I'm still seeing children who are hungry or don't have clean uniforms," he said.

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