

Student group voices black unity

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — New members of the Black Student Union at Nazareth Academy believe that an important step was taken when the group was reinstated near the end of the 1991-92 school year.

"We fought for half of last year to get this in here," said TaMiya Powell, a junior who serves as the group's co-president.

Yet six months later, the union is finding that its work has only begun.

Olena Lylak, advisor for the Black Student Union, believes that the black students' greatest challenge may be to agree on how they should interact with the school's mostly white contingent.

"I see the black students as being very divided, and that's unfortunate. Part of the reason is because there's this thing where some say to each other, 'You're trying to be white,'" said Lylak, who is white. She also serves as Nazareth's dean of students.

Nazareth Academy, 1001 Lake Ave., has an enrollment of 209 students in grades 9 through 12. Seventeen percent of the school's population is black, according to Cheryl Becker, Nazareth's public relations director.

In order to achieve more unity among Nazareth's black population, the Black Student Union reemerged last June. The group had existed for several years before temporarily dissolving after the 1990-91 school year due to lack of interest.

Between 20 and 25 of Nazareth's African-American students regularly attend the group's meetings, held each Thursday afternoon.

Each session begins with a prayer, followed by discussion about various issues regarding the group's African-American culture. The students are currently in the process of formulating their own constitution.

In addition to having Lylak's in-house guidance, the union has also enlisted the help of Shelly Clements, a Nazareth Academy graduate who headed a similar organization while attending the University of Rochester.

Shaquana Divers, the union's secretary, hopes that the group's influence will extend outside Nazareth.

"I want us to get more active in the community and establish bonds with other BSU members (at Rochester-area high schools and colleges)," said Di-



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Some of the Black Student Union's new members at Nazareth Academy in Rochester are (from left) Shaquana Divers, Nikki Corbitt, TaMiya Powell and Tiffany Adams.

vers, a Nazareth junior.

Divers noted that she was highly influenced by the much-anticipated Spike Lee film, *Malcolm X* (see review, page 9), and that she'd like to follow the slain black activist's example.

"The movie reaffirmed my admiration for (Malcolm X's) self-discipline and self-determination," Divers remarked. "What I see from him is how he wanted to change and evolve. Now we have to go out and help our (fellow blacks) change and evolve."

Despite the group's priority on black unity, members emphasized that the Black Student Union should not be perceived as one which promotes separatism.

"We need to break barriers. We'll never get anywhere if we split up and segregate ourselves," commented Powell. "I would just rather not see a difference."

"We want to educate others about our race, because there are a lot of misconceptions," said Tiffany Adams, a senior who serves as vice president of the union. "My goal is to see everyone saying, 'You're black, that's OK; you're Chinese, that's OK; you're white, that's OK.'"

However, the group's other co-president said that a reaffirmation of black pride must occur before African

Americans feel comfortable about interacting with whites.

"We need this group to unify. We can't interact with others if we can't get along with ourselves," commented junior Nikki Corbitt.

Powell stressed that it's not enough for fellow students to merely acknowledge the Black Student Union's existence. Her goal is for students of all heritages to participate in the union's meetings.

Irish essay competition available for students in grades 6-12 until Jan. 2

ROCHESTER — An Irish essay contest, sponsored by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, is being held locally through Jan. 2, 1993.

The essay's topics are: "Who Was James Connolly, and What Was His Contribution to the Easter Uprising?" (grades 6-8); and "What Was the Effect of the Irish Influence on the Labor Movement in the United States from 1870-1920?" (grades 9-12).

Essay length should be between 500-1,000 words for grades 6-8, and between 750-1,500 words for grades 9-12.

The competition is part of a national contest for which winners and runners-up will be awarded cash prizes. Public and private school students may enter.

For details, call Marie Logan at 716/467-3393.

"I'd like to see all African Americans attend at least once, and I'd like to see other races at least peek in and say 'hello,'" she said.

Powell is especially insistent that the Nazareth faculty more outwardly support the group.

"Only three faculty members have actually shown up. To me that's sad, because they tell you to pray all the time — to pray for change and peace," she asserted.



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