

Edited by Yudhijit Bhattacharjee

PIONEERS

Creating connections. Victoria Gray has spent her career collecting the names of creative individuals from all walks of life. Now she's using those contacts to inspire some of the most promising students in the United States.

Last month, Gray brought four Nobelists, three Pulitzer Prize winners, one U.S. senator, and four dozen other high achievers to the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center (SLAC) in Menlo Park, California, for a weekend with 127 high-school students. The goal of the conference, entitled "Adventures of the Mind," was to help students maximize their potential by acquainting them with the life stories of great achievers, says Gray, who trained as a lawyer and who lives in Washington, D.C. Invitees including Michael Calderbank of Princeton High School in New Jersey rubbed elbows with the likes of (left to right) Nobelist Leon Lederman, author Amy Tan, and physicist Janet Conrad.

Gray solicits nominations and selects the students for the meeting—the first was held in Seattle in 2003—with an eye to those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The funding comes from private donors, and the mentors volunteer their time. "They know that through me they can reach the right kids and make a difference," Gray says, "and have fun."



www.sciencemag.org SCIENCE VOL 309 9 SEPTEMBER 2005



Seattle Post-Intelligencer

SEATTLE

| AND THE NORTHWEST |

Friday June 6, 2003

Students embark on intellectual adventure

Experts will help youths achieve their academic potential

BY SAM SHOLSK
P-I reporter

Question: How do you inspire sharp and promising young students who may be underachieving in high school?

One ideal answer: Put them in the same room for three days with 25 of the smartest and most successful artists and scientists in the country.

That is happening this weekend in Seattle through a group called Ad-

ventures of the Mind. About 65 students from around the country have been lucky enough to have been chosen to gather with some of these best and brightest, and to be mentored.

"I've gotten really excited to be here," said Leah Morgan, a 19-year-old from Tacoma who is about to graduate from Stadium

High School and the Hilltop Artists Program, which teaches glass blowing and other arts to at-risk youth.

"I'm really hoping to get inspired, to learn strategies on how to overcome obstacles," said Morgan, who plans to go to art school after taking a year off to work.

Adventures of the Mind was

formed in 2000, and this is the group's first conference, said the director of the group, Victoria Gray.

The goal of the Seattle-based non-profit group is "to nurture potential in young people," said Gray, an educator. Gray was the longtime pro-

SEE ADVENTURE, B3

ADVENTURE: 'Life stories of great achievers can serve as road maps'

FROM B1

ducer of "Achievement Television," a talk show for kids on the ABC cable television network.

The goal is for the high-achieving adults to teach the teens about their lives and work. The conference will host many seminars, including those with such daunting titles as "Curing Cancer," "Prebiotic Life," and "Is Peace Possible?"

"Life stories of great achievers can serve as road maps for inspiring young minds," Gray said.

The students are being taught this weekend by a constellation of leading lights in fields ranging widely from fiction writing and journalism to engineering and art and fund-

ture making.

They include author Jean Auel and vegetarian cookbook guru Mollie Katzen; Apple Computer investor Steve Wozniak; Marvin Minsky, the "Father of Artificial Intelligence"; former Microsoft executive Nathan Myhrvold; former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff John Shalikshvili; and no fewer than six Nobel Prize winners in medicine, physics and chemistry.

Some teachers say it is equally exciting for them to be among one another, and more than occasionally, to learn from the students.

Amy Tan, bestselling author of "The Joy Luck Club," said she has attended similar events over the seven years, sponsored by different groups

Gray has been involved with. She said she "didn't think it was real" the first time someone described an event to her.

"Why would a bunch of Nobel laureates hang out with high school kids?" Tan said. "But it's one of the most incredible learning experiences I've ever had."

The teens will also have some serendipitous time. They will have a chance to watch Dale Chihuly blow glass sculptures. And last night, the opening night of the conference, they had a karaoke and dance party at the Experience Music Project.

Teachers around the country nominated the youths, who are from 15 to 18 years old, Gray said. The teens are "students of exceptional

promise," she said, who for various reasons—family, economic and social pressures—may have not yet achieved their academic potential.

Courtney Fortune, a freshman at Bellingham High School and an aspiring singer and songwriter, said that although music has been a major focus for her, she is excited to be mingling with and learning from experts in a variety of subjects.

"It's a change for me," said Fortune, 15. "It's great to learn about things I'm not focusing on right now."

P-I reporter Sam Sholsk can be reached at 206-468-2126 or ssholsk@seattlepi.com