

The Young Gentlemen are Coming

The YGs are coming. The YGs (pronounced why-GEEs) are intent on securing a bright future for themselves. Some are aware of the uphill battle that they must face but all the YGs are determined to reach the summit of their dreams. The YGs are, mostly, African-American boys. (National statistics indicate that almost 50% of young black males don't finish high school and nearly half of the 2 million persons incarcerated in America's prisons are Black.)

If you live in Williamsport, you probably heard about CAPP, a volunteer group of concern citizens that have formed coalitions with the Williamsport Area School District, City and County governments and local businesses to promote positive self-images for our children. CAPP's purpose is to give "disadvantaged" kids a better chance at life. The organization's goal is to help create productive, civic-minded, respectful and optimistic young adults in an increasingly hostile world of hopelessness and alienation.

In other cities, street gangs and



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drug dealers are recruiting young boys. Latino and African-American boys from single-parent homes are particularly at-risk. To save the boys from the harsh streets, CAPP has created an alternative "gang". The YGs or Young Gentlemen is CAPP's answer to a national epidemic. The YG program fosters high self-esteem and self-respect in the boys and teaches them that every decision has a consequence. While instilling pride, CAPP also engrains a sense of personal responsibility in the Young Gentlemen.

Each boy must sign a "contract" of exemplary behavior. I recently obtained a copy from CAPP's Executive Director, Mr. Loni Gamble. Here are the Five Tenets of Young Gentlemen:

1. We are brothers. This means treating each other with love and

respect. We support each other in all that we do and if we disagree, we are respectful about it. We want to build each other up and make each other stronger, not tear each other down.

2. We will choose our words and actions wisely. All YGs will think before they speak or act. Is it appropriate? Is it necessary?

3. We will respect all people. We must smile and act nicely towards all people – people in and outside of CAPP. Being a Young Gentleman means that we have a reputation to uphold. This means respecting yourself by keeping your pants held up (by a belt, if needed) and by practicing good hygiene.

4. We will show good manners and good judgment. This means having a positive attitude at all times, saying "please" when we wish someone to do something for us and "thank you" for anything they do, no matter how small a favor it may be. Good judgment means thinking about things before acting and not being afraid to ask for help when we need it. None of us have all the answers, but together, we can do great things!

5. Being a YG means that we are Young Gentlemen everywhere, not just at CAPP. Just like it says above, when you respect people more, they respect you more. People who respect you will do anything for you and this will only benefit you and everyone around you. A positive respect for others can go a long way!!!

Clearly, CAPP is preparing Young Gentlemen for a world beyond basketball courts, high school classrooms and talent shows. But, will the world be ready for the YGs?

The "little brothers" will eventually emerge from the program as manly young men searching for good jobs. By avoiding the hidden hazards in their childhood, not bowing to peer pressure and making the right decisions in their lives the boys will deserve rewarding fulfillment. They will have beaten the odds. The resultant shining examples of dignity and self-respect must have a fair chance to compete in the marketplace. Otherwise, they might become disillusioned and bitter.

Will the larger community be ready to accept the new role models

for young Black men? Will the image of respectful, determined, talented and proud young Black men be accepted and welcomed? Or will such an image be disturbing and perhaps, frightening?

I predict the YGs will be the leaders of Williamsport in the 21st Century. They will become factory foremen, job site supervisors, company presidents, elected officials and school district superintendents and principals. They will be lawyers, doctors, business owners and community activists.

Our job, as a community, is to discard the racial prejudices of young Black men and be prepared for a future of multi-cultural leadership. The doors of opportunity that have been traditionally closed to African-American men will be opened to the dynamic individuals known as the YGs.

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