

Educator lauded for 33 years of student success stories

By **BERNICE PAGLIA**
Staff Writer

PLAINFIELD — For 33 years, Bill Gary has looked out for two groups of young people — those with special needs and black students aspiring to go to college.

Recently retired director of special education for the Plainfield district, Gary said the college club he founded has helped more than 2,000 students.

About 300 people gathered Dec. 6 at Embassy Suites in Piscataway to honor him, but Gary said every day he encounters

former college club members who have gone on to become doctors, police officers, firefighters and good citizens.

Some of the people he mentored, including tax assessor Lisa Malloy Stephens and Deputy Executive Director Leslie Anderson of the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority, now guide the New Horizons College Club as it continues to help black students attain higher education.

Gary said consistency is the secret of the club's success.

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"He's leaving something more than a job. The fact that it's been 30-plus years kind of speaks for itself."

LISA MALLOY STEPHENS,
tax assessor who was mentored by Bill Gary

will mentor students," he said, "but then they don't follow through." Once students have experienced the unstinting support of the club, he said, "They almost feel compelled to say, 'Mr. Gary, I want to give back.'"

"College graduates talk to club members about every aspect of getting into college and the pitfalls of college life," he said. "Students visit historically black colleges and can always call

on club leaders for advice after enrollment."

Gary said the Plainfield High School class of 1972 reunion last month gave an example of what could happen through the club's work. "One of the girls is now a doctor in Plainfield," he said.

Gary is a board member emeritus with the club, Stephens said. "This was his idea, his project since day one," she said.

"He's still involved."

But having reached retirement, Gary, 59, said he just wants to "relax and reflect" for a couple of months before perhaps taking on some consultant work.

Gary came to Plainfield from Greenville, S.C., at age 8 and went through Plainfield schools before going to college at Central State in Ohio. He earned his master's degree at Trenton State and his principal's degree at Kean University.

He lives in Piscataway and takes care of his widowed mother, he said, so

he is not going to faraway retirement meccas.

Gary said he has had to accept the fact that he can't go to church, bank or supermarket without encountering someone who recognizes him and seeks his advice or help, either with a special needs issue or a college situation.

"He's leaving something more than a job," Stephens said, noting his legacy with the club. "The fact that it's been 30-plus years kind of speaks for itself."

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