

# He pushed kids to college, now many are saying thanks

By **BERNICE PAGLIA**  
Courier-News Staff Writer

PLAINFIELD — Think of what it takes to shepherd a teen-ager through the college application and entry process. Multiply that by 1,500 and you're ready to meet Bill Gary.

Gary began offering black teens a helping hand 25 years ago, when fewer were college-bound. He has seen his outreach grow to the point that he is now comfortable turning over the reins to a group of young professionals who are themselves products of his program.

Gary will be honored on Sept. 29 for his service in producing a whole generation of college graduates and, as he said of those who did not complete college, "a lot of good citizens."

The college support program began at Neighborhood House as a grassroots "Outreach" effort under the direction of Oliver Bartlett, when many black students were told to forget about college.

"There was a lot of tracking back then," Gary said, with black students steered toward vocational education.

Organizers of the program felt that students were not getting the infor-

## If you go

The 25th Anniversary of the New Horizons College Club will honor founder William Gary at 7 p.m. Sept. 29 at The Westwood in Garwood. Tickets are \$35 per person.

To join the club, juniors and seniors may come to a meeting on any Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Black United Fund Community Center Complex, 403 W. Seventh St.

mation they needed about SAT tests and other prerequisites to college application.

The goal was to have 85 to 90 percent of students in the program go on to college.

But filling out paperwork on time was only part of it. Through role playing, teens practiced what they would do if confronted with obnoxious roommates, peer pressure to take drugs or engage in sex, and ways to keep the goal of graduating foremost.

As for the paperwork, teens heard about the "P-word" — procrastination.

"We literally hassled them," Gary said, so that all obligations were met by spring, and teens could then concentrate on racking up scholarships.

After college, participants were expected to "give back," he said.

On Wednesday at the Black United Fund Community Center complex, Gary sat back as a team including Leslie Anderson of Gov. Christie Whitman's office, Hillside Tax Assessor Lisa Malloy and other professionals conducted an orientation for about 20 students. The adults offered the teens advice on anything and everything that would help them succeed.

After the session, Plainfield High School senior Natasha Clary said she hoped to get "better preparation and future references" from the program, which has been known as New Horizons since 1983.

Joy Harris, a senior at Mount Saint Mary Academy in Watchung, said she hoped to broaden her horizons and get SAT information, while Plainfield High School senior Shani Brinkley lauded Christie Whitman as a role model.

Gary said he is passing the baton reluctantly, though he has confidence in the new leaders. He admitted to feel-



**William Gary**  
... prince of paperwork prep

ing some "separation anxiety."

"I had a lot of trepidation," he said. "I would come down in a snowstorm make sure everything was all right."

But Gary also admitted wondering why he felt weary on the long trips visit colleges, and then he realized "the kids are always 17 or 18, and I was turning 30, 40 ..."

Gary, who is director of pupil personnel and special education in Plainfield, said his own family has been very tolerant in supporting the time-consuming effort.

"They know it's something I enjoy," he said. "In education you know you're not going to be a millionaire, but you leave a legacy."