

Andre Landrum Credits Project LAWS With Raising His Expectations

By Arnold Williams

As Andre Landrum walks across the stage at ASU's commencement this week and receives his degree in finance and communications, he will likely think about when he got his first job.

It was eight years ago, when as a 14-year old, he got a summer job at the prestigious law firm of Snell and Wilmer. He was not a partner's progeny, nor was he enrolled in an exclusive prep

“That job taught me, early on, to be responsible and it opened my eyes to the world of possibilities.”

school. The Trevor Brown freshman was placed through Project LAWS.

Project LAWS provides at-risk and inner-city youth with exposure to a professional business environment, on-the-job training and skill development

“That job taught me, early on, to be responsible and it opened my eyes to the world of possibilities,” he said.

Landrum feels fortunate that he didn't have a typical teenage summer job like

working at the grocery store or the local burger joint. “It raised my expectations and heightened my goals.

“Once you get exposed to the possibilities, you aspire to greater heights and reject the artificial limitations that so often entrap minority youth.”

Subsequently, the experience and work skills learned in that first summer job helped Landrum to land good jobs in high school and college.

“It said a lot to prospective employers when I was able to site Snell and Wilmer as prior work experience and use them as a reference,” Landrum explained. “It gave me a distinct advantage that most of my friends didn't have.”

While are working in their jobs, Project LAWS students attend workforce preparation classes that address on-the-job communication skills, workplace diversity issues, social business graces and



Andre Landrum

career planning.

Next week, Landrum will join Phelps Dodge as one of their newest business analysts.

Project LAWS needs partnerships with corporations, small businesses and

firms to provide employment for youth this summer. Please contact Lillian M. Woods; Founder/Executive Director at (602) 716-9625.

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James Garcia / THE PHOENIX GAZETTE

Getting an inside look at the legal profession during a summer program called Project LAWS are (from left) Elizabeth Worley, Phillip Wilson, Ann Marie Morales, Yvonne Calderon, Nailah Jones and Latausha Scott.

Law preschool

Program gives Valley students glimpse at legal profession

By Donna Hogan
THE PHOENIX GAZETTE

Ann Marie Morales wanted to be a lawyer even as a small child. Because of a prominent Phoenix law firm, the 16-year-old will enter her junior year at South Mountain High School with a better idea of what being a lawyer means.

She also will have some fodder for that back-to-school essay, "How I spent my summer vacation."

Morales is one of six inner-city youths who participated in a 10-week summer program, the brainchild of Brown and Bain legal secretary Lillian Woods.

Woods said she pitched the idea of Project LAWS (Learning and Achieving Work Skills) to her employer in May 1992. A month later, four high school students were at work in her company's offices.

This year the program included two more Valley law firms, and Woods expects to have 20 companies and 50 participants next year.

Woods said she believes it is not enough to teach technical skills in the classroom.

"Most people think they just need education," she said. "What's needed is opportunity. Opportunity creates interest in getting the education."

Although it is funded by the participating firms, LAWS is administered by the Keys Community Center, an education and learn-

ing center that primarily serves residents of south Phoenix.

Danita Apple-White, education and training coordinator for Keys, screened at least 60 applicants for the six slots available this year.

Applicants' selection is based on desire and proven effort toward a goal of higher education, rather than school grades.

The program "was designed to assist students who have been socioeconomically disadvantaged," Apple-White said. "For students in need, grade point average means little."

The teens rotate through the various departments in a firm. They perform clerical tasks and observe the professionals at work.

LAWS provides bus fare and a \$4.50 an hour salary for the students' five-hour workdays.

Washington High School junior Nailah Jones, who hopes to go to law school someday, said she was surprised to learn how much more there is to the profession than what is portrayed on television.

"I didn't realize how much the support staff did," she said. "It's not just going to court. I'm more determined now. It's a great program. It gave me the experience to go on to be what I want to be."

Elizabeth Worley, 20, who plans to earn a Phoenix College associate's degree as a legal assistant, said she learned much more than technical skills.

"I've gained maturity, responsibility. I've grown up a lot," she said. "Not many opportunities like this come around."

Besides selecting the students, Apple-White provides ongoing education and support throughout the program and follows the students' progress.

She counsels the students on how to walk, talk, dress and interact in a corporate environment, teaches them to write effective résumés, job applications and thank-you notes, and leads them through "visualization" exercises.

"It's important not just to have a goal but to see yourself accomplishing it and living it," Apple-White said. "Visualization exercises make them place themselves there so they can see, smell, touch where they are going."

Morales said she liked imagining what it would be like to be a successful lawyer.

She said she envisioned her home, car and, most important, a "happy place" in her own imagination where she now retreats when she feels angry or frustrated.

Apple-White said the students have more confidence that they can attain their goals after participating in a program like LAWS.

Apple-White hopes they all leave the program with a sense of self-confidence, self-love and self-esteem.

"After all, isn't that what many of us lack?" she added.

High-schoolers taste work life at law firm

ALEX THEODOROPoulos

Special for the Business Gazette

Four inner-city high-school students are getting a chance this summer to let their corporate colors show while they work in one of Phoenix's largest law firms, Brown & Bain.

Project Laws is designed to encourage the students to seek higher education, to expose them to the law profession and to give them experience working in a corporate environment.

For at least one student, the program has been a blessing in disguise.

"I tried and I tried and I tried to get a job at Fry's (a supermarket chain), and they wouldn't hire me," said Damian Cuspad, a junior at South Mountain High School.

Now, he said, he thinks working at the law firm is a better way to spend his summer.

Project Laws was created by Lilian Woods, a legal secretary for

Brown & Bain and a member of the educational advisory board at the Keys Community Center in Phoenix.

Brown & Bain and the non-profit community center work together on the 10-week program, which is in its first year. Students attend workshops at the community center from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., then work at Brown & Bain from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

Brown & Bain pays the students \$4.50 per hour.

The workshops cover such topics as appropriate dress, positive thinking and creating resumes. Once students get to Brown & Bain, they work and learn about the major functions of a law firm. They are trained in everything from library skills to word processing to maintenance.

"I've learned that every job is important," said the young Mr. Cuspad, who plans to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta and study entertainment law.



JEFF TOPPING, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

NEW PERSPECTIVE: "I've learned that every job is important," said Damian Cuspad, a high school junior employed at Brown & Bain.

The other students involved in the project are Natalie Hillman, a sophomore at South Mountain who plans to attend the University of Arizona and study law; Iloni Renteria, a sophomore at Metro Tech Vocational Institute who hopes to become a fashion designer; and Roland Walker, a senior at South Mountain aiming for a career as an electrical engineer.

Lynda Rando, director of the Center for Law-Related Education

of the Arizona Bar Foundation, said she was not aware of other law firms' offering programs similar to Project Laws.

However, she said the foundation offers a weeklong program that teaches students about the criminal-justice system. The Arizona Summer Law Camp covers such topics as mediation and involves students in mock trials, among other activities, Ms. Rando said.

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