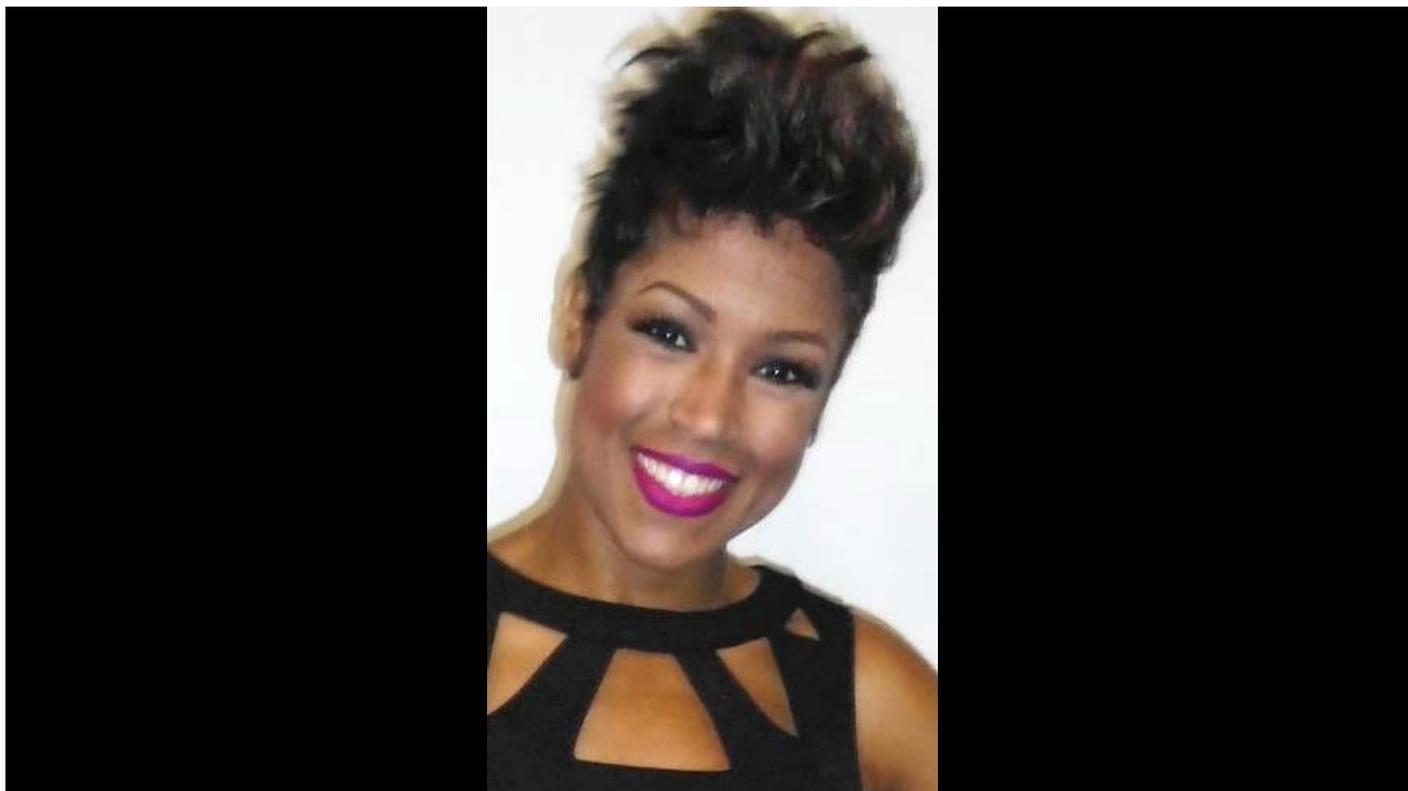


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Speaker at parenting breakfast has first-hand experience



Val Warner, a mother and co-host of "Windy City Live," was the keynote speaker for the Indiana Parenting Institute forum in Merrillville. (Sue Ellen Ross, Post-Tribune)

By **Sue Ellen Ross**

Post-Tribune

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t ▾ Her kids know “mom is there, no matter how busy our lives are,” Warner says

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Personal insight can lend credibility to a speaker, such as it did when Val Warner, co-host of ABC-TV's "Windy City Live," talked to a crowd of more than 100 attending a breakfast in Merrillville about parenting.

Parenting is a balancing act, she said at the kickoff of a parent awareness event sponsored by the Indiana Parenting Institute, the city of Gary, Lighthouse Academies and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

"I don't want to paint an all-rosy picture of parenting," the single mother of two said as she welcomed the crowd. "I've had my share of challenges, my highs and lows. But parenting can be the most rewarding job ever."

According to the television celebrity, skills she uses to make work and family come together are, "patience, perseverance and the power of prayer." Also, she said, making time for the small, important things, and the support of family and good friends also are key.

The public was invited to join in the celebration of people raising children in Northwest Indiana.

"Val serves as a good example of a parent able to successfully balance the many roles she has to play in her life without unduly sacrificing the effective nurturing and rearing of her children," said Jená Bellezza, Indiana Parenting Institute vice president of Marketing and Community Relations. "And she is accomplishing this as a single parent in high demand."

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Among those in the audience were school teachers, school administrators and representative of various organizations, as well as parents and individuals.

As a counselor at LaPorte High School, Christine Rosenbaum receives dozens of emails. The recent Indiana Parenting Institute breakfast invitation caught her eye — not just because of Warner's appearance, but because she is always on the lookout for resources to use and recommend to her students and parents.

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"I don't know exactly what to expect today," she said, as she headed for the sign-in table. "I'm sure I'll be going home with lots of notes. In turn, I'll discuss the information at next week's parent-teacher meeting."

The annual breakfast has been celebrating, supporting and honoring Hoosier parents since 2007. In April, organizations are asked to call attention to the need for effective and responsible parenting by acknowledging and appreciating the caregivers they service and employ by offering recognition ceremonies, distributing literature and sponsoring workshops.

After Warner wrapped up her presentation, she posed for photos and chatted with audience members, then she mentioned that her schedule was pretty tight and she needed to exit soon: Her son had a soccer game in Indianapolis and she needed to pack, get the kids ready, and get on the road.

"They know their mom is there, no matter how busy our lives are," said Warner, who also was raised by a single mother. "I want to show them the same love my parents showed to me."

After the keynote speech, a four-member panel consisting of Joe Van Dyk with the city of Gary; Ken Barry with the Gary Youth Services Bureau, Marti Rivas-Ramos with First Midwest Bank and the Indiana Parenting Institute board president, and Gary parent Richenda Moss offered a question-and-answer-period for attendees.

A parenting resource fair, new this year and sponsored by the Indiana Parenting Institute, was held in Gary the day after the breakfast.

"At IPI, we believe the best way to serve our youth is to serve their parents," said Laura Smith-Wynn, the institute's executive director and founder. "Our service comes through education, keeping families in the know on the best tactics to achieve their desired outcomes for themselves and their

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children.

"As many of the families we work with are underserved or at-risk, we diligently solicit the community's support to get them on the path to success."

For more information about Indiana Parenting Institute, call (219) 886-1111 or go to <http://www.indianaparentinginstitute.org>.

Sue Ellen Ross is a freelance reporter.

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