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Organization wants to empower parents

By Lisa Deneal Post-Tribune correspondent April 1, 2011 1:36PM

Updated: August 4, 2011 4:20PM

If you go

What: Celebrating Family: A Day of Togetherness, sponsored by Indiana Parenting Institute, Gary South Shore RailCats and Educational Talent Search (Purdue Calumet).

Where: Diamond Club at RailCats Stadium.

When: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, April 16.

What: "Get to Know the Work of IPI" Board Reception featuring Indiana Parenting Institute Board Chair Speros Batistatos and the IPI Board Officers.

Where: Indiana Welcome Center, 7770 Corinne Drive in Hammond.

When: 6 p.m. Friday, April 22. RSVP by April 16

For more information, contact IPI marketing director Jena Bellezza, 886-1111 or jena@indianaparentinginstitute.org. Or visit the office at 839 Broadway, Room B96-Lower. Visit their website, www.indianaparentinginstitute.org.

GARY — The Indiana Parenting Institute kicked off its fifth Parenting Awareness Month Indiana at Plaza One Bistro on Friday with a breakfast celebration for parents and volunteers involved in the organization.

IPI executive director Laura Smith-Wynn said her organization is to be an empowering force to the parents so they can improve their interactive skills and pass them down to their children. "This empowerment and praise will inspire them to work with their children and result in positive families. I believe in uplifting our parents because when they see someone cares about them they will work to be better. Being a parent is not an easy task and we should not put our parents down," she said.

Smith-Wynn added that her passion in creating the Indiana Parenting Institute in 2007 comes from personal experiences of growing up in the South.

"I come from a family who did everything together. We were poor but did not know it because we were rich in everything," she said. "I came from a family of sharecroppers but our father expressed the importance of three things — a good education, a piece of land to call your own and a job that you appreciated.

"Most of all, they allowed us children to be children. That should ring true for families today," she said.

IPI is also family-operated as Smith-Wynn's daughter, Jena' Bellezza is the marketing director.

IPI has many supporters including board chairman Speros Batistatos of the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority.

"I met Laura and Jena' two years ago at an event and could not be more pleased to be on the board of Indiana Parenting Institute," Batistatos said.

"I am from Gary and live in Gary, and we cannot keep doing the same thing when it comes to our community. We have to make changes in our community one family at a time. All of us have to pull together."

Smith-Wynn recognized parents who took courses at IPI including The Joy Project and Birth 2 Eighteen Parent Training Program. Kimberlee Ward of Gary said when she started the IPI program she felt she knew everything about parenting because she raised a soon-to-be college graduate.

"But I also have a 7-year-old son and if not for him looking like me, I would think he was from another planet," Ward said with a laugh.

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She added that IPI helped her as she made transitions from being a well-paid professional to homeless and getting back on her feet. "My son was affected by my changes and I did not see it. But it has gotten much better and he is doing very well."

Smith-Wynn also presented awards and recognition to parent volunteers, including Kendra S. Johnson, student volunteer Marisha Bailey, Tennille Foster, and Willie and LaTanya Woodson.

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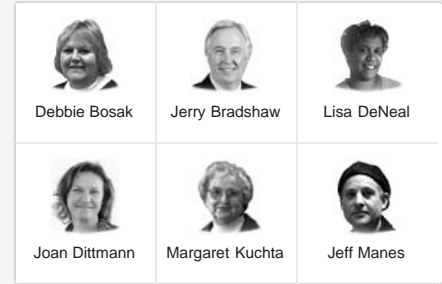
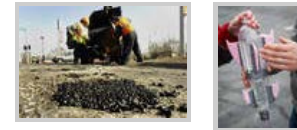


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