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Fair is all about putting family first

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BY SUE ELLEN ROSS Post-Tribune correspondent May 2, 2014 5:56PM

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GARY — The recent Eighth Annual Parenting Awareness Month Indiana Parenting Fair was billed as an event that provided resources and a fun time for parents.

But the dozens of children present in the gymnasium of the Baber Youth Center/First AME Church seemed to get the most information and have as much fun as the adults.

Sponsored by the Indiana Parenting Institute (IPI) and Community & Faith Outreach Initiative, the event included games, giveaways, face painting, a mime presentation, a balloon artist, food vendors, music and a demonstration by the Department.

“PAMI is an IPI public awareness initiative and is a monthlong celebration of people raising children in communities,” IPI marketing and community relations director Jena Bellezza said. “Throughout the month of April, attention is given to effective and responsible parenting education that advances the well-being of children. ... via celebrations of parents on current parenting issues.”

Among the 21 vendors involved at the fair were family services providers who distributed information about access to resources in the Calumet Region — utility assistance, rent assistance, food banks, transportation assistance, child care, mental health care/health insurance, financial literacy, housing, and legal assistance.

Manning the table for Habitat for Humanity was Sonia Zuniga, assistant manager of the organization’s Re-Store in Hammond, in length with Gary resident Laconjala Clark about home ownership through the organization’s program.

The working mom of eight children did not know that the Habitat for Humanity program, which helps people own homes through an equity procedure, existed until she saw Zuniga at the parenting fair.

“I’m so excited about this,” Clark said after getting the particulars and finding that she meets the criteria, as she raised her arm. “The first thing I am going to do when I get home is fill out the application. This type of opportunity is a big one for me.”

Lew Wallace STEM Academy art teacher Kathryn Province and student Jabari Bell volunteered their creative services at the table.

“This fair is a great thing for our parents and the many concerns they face,” Province said as she drew a red head girl. “It lets them know they are not alone.”

The fair is not just a growth opportunity for its attendees but also an opportunity to celebrate people raising children and promote family togetherness, according to Bellezza.

“Families today do not spend much time together,” she said. “Due to fast-paced lives, hectic schedules, risks are challenged with today, many are experiencing gradual deteriorations in their family relationships. Yet family togetherness is important.”

Studies have shown that parents who spend quality time with their children stay better connected with them, and children better ward off the pressures they find themselves faced with today, according to information distributed by the

The Community & Faith Outreach Initiative, made up of representatives from various Northwest Indiana churches and for grandparents and other relatives who are raising children when the children’s own parents are unable or unwilling to do so.

The Initiative provides programs, workshops and activities that offer support, uniting the family and drawing the attention of and health care providers to one central location to provide information and assistance.

The Indiana Parenting Institute also provides various programs and workshops for families. For more information visit www.indianaparentinginstitute.org.

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