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Merrillville woman wins Indiana Black Expo award

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By Michael Gonzalez Post-Tribune correspondent July 17, 2013 1:24PM

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Laura Wynn grew up a sharecropper's daughter in a tiny Arkansas town.

Tuesday afternoon, the vivacious Merrillville woman joined 12 other Hoosiers in receiving awards from Gov. Mike Pence before hundreds of guests as part of the Indiana Black Expo activities.

"I'm very excited and confused, too, because this is not something you ever expect," Wynn, founder of the Indiana Parenting Institute, said Monday. "It's such an honor, and it's been such a tremendous journey.

"My father always taught me when you go into a new community, don't go looking for what you can get. Look for what you can give."

The institute, launched in 2007 in Wynn's basement and now housed in downtown Gary, works with parents to develop good parenting and family skills and offers them resources. Parents attend classes at 839 Broadway, at local schools and other locations throughout Northwest Indiana.

That commitment to working with parents is the unique approach that landed Wynn in the governor's sights, said Jackie Burroughs, a special assistant to Pence.

Other award recipients were in business, civic and cultural heritage leadership, she said.

"We thought (Wynn's) approach to reach out to parents was unique," Burroughs added. "And her history certainly does add to it, when you look at someone pushing through the mentality of a sharecropper's daughter and reaching out to help so many others."

Jena Bellezza, the institute's marketing and community relations director, said uniqueness and commitment define her mother's work.

"I've seen the (IPI) since its birth, the hard work and, even more, the results, and I think what (Wynn's) gifted with, it works," Bellezza said. "And, I really didn't see anyone else doing it."

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