

Towson to host Alvin Ailey Camp

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By Stacy M. Brown

Bullying stems from how individuals feel about themselves and how they treat others, according to Linda Denise Fisher-Harrell. Therefore, it is supremely important that young people feel good about themselves at school, home and among friends and peers.

“Young people, especially those of middle-school age, are very impressionable and they’re at a point in their lives that’s pivotal,” said Fisher-Harrell, a professor at Towson University and alumni of the Baltimore School for the Arts. “So, one reason we decided to do a summer camp is particularly to help build self-esteem and other life skills.”

The summer camp Towson University will offer beginning in June is “AileyCamp” Baltimore, a free innovative program for children ages 11 to 14 that uses disciplined dance training, creative writing instruction, personal development, and communication workshops to help camp-goers develop a respect for themselves and others that meaningfully impact their lives.



The school will host AileyCamp in the Center for the Arts, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Because of planned make-up days due to inclement weather this winter, officials say they will be able to announce an exact start date for the camp at a later date.

An open house has been scheduled for Saturday, March 1, 2014 at Towson’s Center for the Arts.

“It’s been a long journey,” said Fisher-Harrell, a former principal dancer with Alvin Ailey who arrived at Towson in 2005. “It’s been a natural progression for me to try and bring that part of my life to Towson. We’d bring in snippets of Ailey’s choreography for my students to perform and that was awesome. That grew to bringing the junior company here, which is going well and the next step was for the community to have AileyCamp here.”

Officials say the program contains six objectives, including: providing relevant role models for success; developing specific, measurable physical, analytical and artistic skills; and providing a performance experience that creates a sense of success and triumph.

“It’s not what people think. It’s not a dance training camp,” Fisher-Harrell said. “So, we’re not looking for the best dancers, the highest kicks. It’s really a self-empowerment camp and we’re targeting the underserved— kids who might have challenges maybe at school or at home who need that extra boost of confidence in order to succeed.”

Fisher-Harrell says dance will be used as a discipline to help teach self-esteem, to plan goals; conflict resolution; self-respect; and other tools.

Officials hope to raise enough funds to ensure that they can continue to offer the program free of charge to students and their families.

“We really need supporters who believe in these kinds of things,” Fisher-Harrell said. “We need those who believe in Ailey’s legacy because it’s his legacy that we’re continuing. This is a labor of love, the fundraising is tough, but making this a free component is very important because for children to try and enroll in school for private lessons, that’s a lot of money and so many families don’t have that in their budgets. They don’t have the opportunity to give their children that special gift of movement.”

Initially, the program will host between 50 and 64 children, depending upon how much money is raised. Students will not be required to audition, but must submit to an interview.

“It’s a one-on-one conversation where we just want to get to know a little about them,” Fisher-Harrell said. “We want to know what they like about school, what challenges they face, and what kind of friends they have, what kind of household and how they’re getting along there. We’re trying to get to know them and we’re trying to understand who will benefit.”