CSU celebrates ‘The village’

Ladies of The Ancillary Group celebrated for fundraising efforts on behalf of students

CHICAGO, Sept. 12, 2011—The proverbial village that raises the child also sends that kid to college.

In that spirit, Chicago State University’s longtime volunteer TAGers — The Ancillary Group — met Monday to reaffirm their commitment to raising money for CSU students. Eight members met with Chicago’s black newspaper publishers in the office of CSU President Wayne D. Watson to launch another year of volunteering at CSU events as hostesses and holding events that provide critical dollars that make the difference in whether a student finishes college.

“Dollar figure, what the TAGers have done, at a minimum it's $100,000 plus a year in savings,” Watson said. “Every event we have, it takes individuals to man the doors, to man the tables, to help people to get certain seating, to take the tickets and to give individuals guidance as they come in.

“Well, those individuals are these ladies, times four,” Watson said. “Imagine if we had to pay for that. So when you talk about taking it to the bottom line, translating their efforts, easily it’s $100,000 a year, and in some years, a quarter of a million. That’s pure work effort.”

The TAGers were founded in 1974 when Dr. Benjamin Alexander became the first black president of CSU, and the first African-American at the time to head a four-year university in Illinois. His ambitious plans included designating a group of influential women, including Elsie Parker, Bernadine Washington and the Rev. Clara Puckett, to establish an adjunct board to take on the much-needed task of fundraising.

Their early events included hosting concerts with Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte, Gladys Knight and Ray Charles. They gifted a Geraldine McCullough triptych to CSU and hosted cultural events on and off campus. TAGers also have visited the state Senate to talk about intergenerational leadership. At the time, Washington said of the TAGers: "It is my hope that this group will work to assist the university in increasing its margin of excellence, and provide, by way of fundraising activities, monies for unrestricted and special needs."

Today, the group is helmed by Belinda McFolling, daughter-in-law of Elsie Parker of the Parker House Sausage Co.

“You know, at the end of the day, it’s not just about TAGers getting together to have a party,” said Katey Assem, executive director of the CSU Foundation. “They have a purpose — to raise money to give scholarships.”

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Chicago State University was founded as a teacher-training school in Blue Island, Illinois, on September 2, 1867. Today, the university is a fully accredited public, urban institution located on 161-picturesque acres in a residential community on Chicago’s south side. CSU is governed by a board of trustees appointed by the Governor of Illinois. The university’s five colleges — health sciences, arts and sciences, business, education and pharmacy — offer 36 undergraduate, 25 master’s degree and two doctoral degree programs. CSU also offers an interdisciplinary Honors College for students in all areas of study and has a division of continuing education and nontraditional degree programs that offers extension courses, distance learning and not-for-credit programs to the entire Chicago community.