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Challenging kids

By Sue Ellen Ross

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Hammond community activist Arnold Ridgell Sr., who died in 2010, was well liked and highly respected in his Hammond community. And his love of education lives on, thanks to BrainWare Safari, an after-school computer-based program introduced recently at Maywood Elementary School purchased through a gift from Smith, Bizzell and Warner Funeral Home.

“There aren’t many enrichment programs in this area, so this is a great opportunity to challenge the kids,” said parent Debbie Harvey, whose son Charles is among the 30 students learning the program. “I think it will encourage them to learn much more.”

The recent kickoff event found more than 200 parents, students and community members gathered in the school cafeteria to meet those responsible for the after-school enrichment program.

“The late Arnold Ridgel Sr. devoted his life to encouraging young people to follow the path of higher education,” Smith, Bizzell and Warner CEO Kelvin Pennington said. “This donation is a fitting tribute to his passion.”

Pennington, along with Smith, Bizzell and Warner’s Sandi Cogan and Hammond City Councilman Anthony Higgs, all of whom were personal friends of Ridgell’s, agreed the after-school program would be an appropriate way to honor this man and his vision for Hammond students.

“I knew Arnold Ridgell personally,” Cogan said. “He was a mentor to many of the young people in East Chicago back in the day, always encouraging us to stay in school and embrace education.”

“I was very excited when I heard the news,” Maywood principal Michael Nance said of the gift. “I look upon this as an opportunity to expand the experience of our children in an enrichment =.”

Ridgell’s daughter, Camillia Ridgell Robinson, works at Smith, Bizzell and Warner.

“This gift comes as a surprise to me; it’s such a wonderful way to honor him,” she said at the kickoff celebration. “My father would be very humble if he knew of this honor — very humble.”

Ridgell’s son Charlton and Charlton’s daughter CharshanDria, 8, were also in attendance. CharshanDria is among the 30 students using the Safari program.

“I remember my grandfather as caring and so loving. He was always nice to his family,” she said. “I’m happy to be in the new program.”

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