

THE ACE MENTOR PROGRAM --- BUILDING SUCCESS STORIES

Made possible through member support of our fundraising efforts, the CMAA Southern California Chapter has donated \$3,000 to the ACE Mentor Program in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. The ACE (Architecture, Construction and Engineering) program strives to help inner-city youth join the design and construction professions. Local ACE Director Terry Dooley and an alumnus of the program, Thai Nguyen, spoke at the recent CMAA Awards Banquet, thanking the association and its members for their support.

Thai was a member of one of the first ACE high school teams in southern California, at John Marshall High School in the Los Feliz area in 2003. With the help of ACE Mentor scholarship money, he went on to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where he received a degree in Construction Management. He now is a Project Engineer for PCL Construction in Glendale, and is back at John Marshall High School as mentor team leader for the ACE team still active there. Through these years, Thai has been inspired and helped by the ACE Program, and aided by the internships with ACE cooperating firms.

PURPOSE, METHOD

ACE introduces inner-city high school students to professionals from the design and construction and construction management fields, and shows the ways that students could follow in their footsteps. There are two objectives: (1) Help to produce the next generation of design and construction professionals, and (2) Open doors for urban youth to opportunities they might not otherwise know about or know how to access. In Los Angeles, the ACE student population is about 80% from what typically are considered under-privileged groups. About half are women. Alumni have entered 35 different colleges and universities. Two have begun carpenter apprenticeships.



In autumn the model is “show-and-tell”, with professionals demonstrating what they do and telling what education and experience it took to get there. The students visit professional offices and construction sites. Some of the mentors are minority group members, with links to the inner-city.

In spring the team works on a design/budget problem assigned by local ACE leadership. In 2008 Los Angeles teams determined a specific new building need on their own school campus. They then designed, modeled, and budgeted (with mentors’ help) structures that fit to scale within the footprints of their school sites.

GROWTH

The program was born in southern California in three high schools with 45 ACE students. Nine were seniors. In May 2003 each senior was awarded in the right to a small scholarship if he or she documented entrance into a college level program in one of the ACE disciplines.

There now are 17 mentoring teams involving students from 24 high schools in three counties. Approximately 350 high school students are involved. At the May 2009 Annual Awards Event, rights to \$1,000 college scholarships were granted to 47 graduating high school seniors. A necessary corollary is a vigorous fund-raising program. Approximately 100 professionals now mentor in the Los Angeles area. They come from wide array of design, construction and education disciplines. About 70 firms are involved.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?



Firms and individuals wishing to assist in this mentoring effort would be most welcome, and could help in some or all of these ways:

- Contribute funds for scholarships.
- Host an ACE high school team in your office or at your construction site. Groups usually are about 20 students plus a few mentors and teachers. Meetings are after school, late afternoon. Show and tell the students what you do, how you do it, and what education it took to get there.
- Provide an internship for an “alumnus” of ACE, now in college.
- Join an on-going team as a mentor, or lead a new team. Most are built a high school, or a small cluster of close-together schools.

To help in this worthy effort, contact:

Chuck Whitaker, Chairman-Board of Directors
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For more information about the program nationally: www.ACEmentor.org

For more information about activity in this area: www.ACEmentor.org/579

Terry Dooley
Member of Board of Directors
ACE Mentor Program Los Angeles Metro Area