

Mr. William "Bill" Washington  
Sprint World Headquarters  
2330 Shawnee Mission Parkway  
Westwood, Kansas 66205

Subject: Request for Support of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center's Computer Training for Telecommunications.

Dear Mr. Washington,

The W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center is a community-based program that has been operating since 1973 tutoring and mentoring area youth in enrichment and remedial academic subjects. We operate with an all-volunteer staff, consisting of area professionals and craftsmen such as accountants, computer scientists and technology specialists, educators, electricians, engineers, etc.

Recently we instituted a telecommunications aspect to our Computer Science Program. Our objective is to address the fact that so many of our young people are unable to gain exposure to this emerging and advanced technology (similar to what Southwestern Bell is doing with their Telecommunications Center they operate at Penn Valley Community College). We are teaching our youth about Internet technology by explaining how the World Wide Web works and showing them how to browse the Internet, write and maintain web pages, etc. We also teach them about upgrading and repairing computers, along with how networks are structured and utilized.

Currently we have the capability of hosting web pages. We host web pages written by our staff and students for some community based organizations and small businesses who ordinarily would be left out of this technology. We would like to be able to offer the youth and community more advanced training. Some of the things that could make this possible are better computers (we have mostly 486's), servers, and a better service line (we have a 56kb). We would appreciate any support that you could give us.

Thanks for your consideration. You can visit our web site at "[www.duboislc.com](http://www.duboislc.com)."

Sincerely,

Leon Dixon  
Chairman  
W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center

C.C. Chris Thomas

Mr. Chris Thomas  
Sprint LTD  
6600 College Blvd. Suite 215  
Shawnee, Kansas 66211

# Historical Brief of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center

By Leon Dixon, Jr. (July 1999)

## NARRATIVE

The W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center is a combination of two efforts designed to address the languishing educational situation in Greater Kansas City's African American community. Bill Grace and some friends had begun working with some of Central High School youth that had begun falling behind in their reading skills. Shortly thereafter Leon Dixon and some colleagues had begun to work with some community young people to improve their mathematical ability, in both enrichment and remediation.

Grace and friends, inspired by the book, *Souls of Black Folk*, by DuBois, named their effort operating out of the Paseo United Methodist Church "The W.E.B. DuBois Reading Center." Dixon and colleagues referred to their efforts, which was a Southern Leadership (SCLC) program operating out of the St. James Gregory United Methodist Church, as a "Mathematics Clinic" (based on a tutoring program he had work in at Texas Southern University).

The Rev. John L. Preciphs of Paseo UMC, along with Grace and friends, had been actively working with youth in community outreach. The Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, II of St. James Gregory UMC (who later would become the mayor of Kansas City, MO) along with Dixon and some others activist had established the Greater Kansas City Chapter of SCLC. Rev. Cleaver naturally enlisted one of his mentors, Rev. Preciphs, into SCLC. Rev. Preciphs immediately saw the need for the two educational programs to work together. That union in 1973 precipitated the name change to the "W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center" (DLC) to indicate the tutoring of a variety of academic subjects.

The DLC operates with an all-voluntary staff. And one of its telling aspects is that it is an institution structured wherein area professionals and others can donate their time and talent to support the educational aspirations of the youth in our community. Those with technical backgrounds tutor mathematics, while those with humanities backgrounds tutor reading.

In our formative years we worked with approximately 10 to 20 students in each program. We refused to advertise for fear of being swamped with students. Be that as it may, we found ourselves continuously growing each year. In 1978 we were averaging about 40 to 60 students per program. That fall we incorporated sessions in the natural sciences. Shortly thereafter we moved to the Second Baptist Church which provided us with larger facilities.

Another of the significant aspect of the DLC is that it allows for students who are have trouble grasping a particular concept to come and get clarity. This has resulted in what may be called a dynamic enrollment. Some students may stay for a few weeks or months, whereas others may stay throughout the school year. And there are still others who may be called our regular students who enroll year after year.

This approach has enabled us to help many students as they encountered difficulties and prevented them from falling behind, and helped others before the fell too far behind. It was perhaps one of the reasons we continued to experience growth. We were regarded as a place where students could come for emergency assistance.

In the early eighty's we moved our mathematics component to our current location, which was then operated by Freedom, Inc., a political organization based in our community. In late 1983 they ceded the premises to us, to which we later moved the operations of our other programs. By now we were averaging around 100 students weekly, with over 400 students enrolling per year, causing us to maintain a waiting list.

In the beginning we had no idea that we would acquire the status we now had. We had concentrated our efforts on recruiting persons who were proficient in their respective fields who were also willing donate a few ours a week to work with our children. Now we had a building to maintain, funds to raise, etc. Now we desperately needed the public relations, fundraiser, management, and business types.

Before we acquired the building, we only required a meager operating budget. Then the Oppenstein Brothers foundation, the United Methodist Church, among others, awarded us grants that enabled us to function. Later, after the acquisition of the building, the parents, desiring to help out, decided to assess themselves a small enrollment fee (\$45 per family per year). We were also able to obtain a bingo permit, which helped us to hold until we began to acquire funds from community folk designating the DLC for their United Way contributions (they had to write in our names because we were not granted United Way organization status).

In the late eighty's the U.S. Department of Energy gave us a \$10,000 grant to ascertain science equipment and the Allied Signal Corporation awarded us a \$25,000 grant to initiate a computer science program (they subsequently awarded us \$40,000 more).

The mid-ninety's witnessed the emerging significance of the Internet and Information Technology (IT). With that was the realization that our community, especially our youth, was beginning to fall behind in acquiring telecommunication and IT skills, and access to and usage of the Internet. Our computer staff deemed it necessary that we address this situation.

We slowly began to acquire the capability order to offer various community institutions to host their web-pages. We offer to train young people how to write and maintain them, and they in turn could offer their services to the institutions they were affiliated with,

especially the churches. This approach we reasoned would serve to both introduce and expose the technology to our community and offer training at the same time.

Already we have seen positive results with our overall approach, and depending on the resources we are able to continue to acquire, we envision an even brighter future.

## **SOME SUCCESS HIGHLIGHTS**

The nature of our efforts makes it difficult for us to keep track of our former students. We find ourselves relying mostly on former students, their family members, or others who know about them keeping in touch with us. Among those of our early years that we have heard about are:

- Harry Gaines; a 1978 Central High School alumni who is an electrical engineering graduate from Southern University and is now a pilot for Trans World Airlines. He was inspired, he has said, to choose his major because of electrical engineers he met at the DLC.
- Kellye Davidson Hansley; a 1981 Lincoln High School alumni and a business graduate from Northwest Missouri State university. She is a commercial real estate manager for Nations Bank.

After the mid-eighties things began to take off. We were now beginning to see the results of those students who started with the DLC while they were young and stayed with us. Some of them we were able to get advanced two years in their mathematics classes. Among them are:

- Shawn Edwards; a 1986 Van Horn High School alumni and a communications graduate from University of Missouri at Kansas City. He worked in telecommunications in cable television for Kansas City, MO before becoming a journalist for *The Pitch* newspaper.
- Angela Maxey; a 1986 Lincoln High School alumni and a Business communications graduate from Friends University in Wichita.
- Lisa Bond; a 1987 Lincoln High School alumni and a mechanical engineering graduate from Prairie View A&M, now working for General Motors. She has stated that a young mechanical engineering graduate from Southern University who worked with her at the DLC inspired her to choose her field.
- Larry McDaniels; a 1990 Lincoln High School alumni and a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army is an electrical engineering graduate from Florida A&M, where he enrolled in their Officer Training Program. While Larry was in Lincoln, he was helping junior college students with calculus.

There were plenty of other students that received both enrichment and help maintaining grade level. Several of them who went on to attain college degrees are:

- Kima Edwards; a 1986 Van Horn High School alumni and a economics graduate from Hampton University who is finishing up work on her MBA degree.
- Cornell Perry, Jr.; 1987 Lincoln alumni and a commissioned officer in the U.S. Coast Guard, electrical engineering graduate, Prairie View A&M who has also earned an MBA. Cornell is also involved in tutoring young people in the Washington D.C. area and has also started up a small business using IT skills along with another PV graduate, Marty Johnson who was mentored into going into electrical engineering by DLC staffers. Both Cornell and Marty enrolled in PV's Coast Guard Officer Training Program.
- Shannon Kennedy Johnson; a 1988 Southwest High School alumni and a registered nurse Avila College graduate. She is a case manager for the Prudential Insurance, Co. and a former reservists for the US Army. Shannon enrolled in the Army ROTC program in Avila. She was chosen for a special assignment in Germany which lasted for several weeks.

During the late eighties the dean of engineering from Prairie View A&M approached us about recruiting Engineering students. We gladly accepted the offer and as a result of our joint efforts we were told that PV had more students from the Greater Kansas City Area than any city outside of the state of Texas. One year six graduated from PV that included a mathematics major, a mechanical engineering major and four electrical engineering majors. And then there was the Scott family that produced three PV graduates.

In 1987 we helped 19 students obtain college scholarships, academic and athletic, most of whom had no other course to pursue their higher education.

One of our interesting stories out of the nineties is that of Kisa and Sherita Caruthers. These fraternal twin sisters went to different colleges. Kisa graduated in architectural engineering from Tennessee State University in Nashville, while Sherita graduated in accounting from Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville. Their mother was worried that their commencements would be on the same weekend and she didn't want to have to choose which to go to. I remember saying to her, "If you have to have a problem; that's a good one to have. I know of a lot of parents who would gladly trade problems with you."

After we began our IT sessions we noticed that we had two men in their mid-forties, one high school drop out who had acquired his GED and another with a jr. college degree in computer science, who worked with our computer staff members setting up our network and other IT applications. As a result, they were able to find gainful employment through temporary agencies.

Currently we have several former DLC students in college working on a variety of degrees. We have plans to establish programs designed to ferret out potential talent as the two persons referred to above, thereby addressing their needs and the growing need of the IT industry for employees.

