NNB News : 2013 : 11 : 18 : Midtown Community Leader: Elizabeth "Momma" Perkins

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Midtown Community Leader: Elizabeth "Momma" Perkins

BY ANDREA LUNA

NNB Student Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — On a hot fall day the sun is scorching the pavement making the heat rise in visible waves as the eighth-grade class patiently waits for Elizabeth "Auntie" Perkins to unlock the classroom door.

The school’s website describes their mission:

“To inspire and empower students qualifying for need-based scholarships to become future community leaders through a rigorous middle school program coupled with ongoing graduate support.”

Elizabeth and her colleague Sonja Felton are the ongoing graduate support. They keep in touch with the students through high school and college.

The sizzling of the pavement and the lively conversations are drowned out by the school bell. Elizabeth unlocks the door and props it open with her body as the students file their way into the air-conditioned classroom.

The gentlemen are first.

One by one they acknowledge Mrs. Perkins with a firm handshake and a “good morning.”

She locks eyes with each one of them and shows off her pearly white teeth.

One student tries to sneak past her without acknowledging.

Big mistake.

She pulls him back to the door by his sweater and ensures he starts the process again, this time with a
firm handshake, a “good morning Mrs. Perkins,” and full eye contact.

The process repeats until all the ladies have made their way into the classroom.

This is the graduating class at Academy Prep Center of St. Petersburg, Fla., and today they are working on their high school applications.

She walks the room checking on the progress of each student and answering as many questions as she can.

This is her time to encourage these kids about their future. This is her time to make them realize their potential and to show them options they may have never considered.

Mrs. Perkins has been helping kids find their potential and changing lives for 11 years.

Class is done, and the filing out process is much quicker as the students rush to the basketball courts. Mrs. Perkins is still the door proper and smiles at each of them on their way out.

As we make our way to her office she stops multiple times to talk to different students.

She knows each one by name. She gets on their level and looks eyes and for that moment, they are all she sees. Undivided attention.

She asks where they are coming from and where they are headed. She reminds them to walk. She uses terms of endearment like “baby” and “sweetheart.”

Any outsider looking in would think that this is a mother who came to visit her child at school. Lastly, she sends them off with a smile and tells them to have a great day.

Her journey continues to her office.

The door opens and a slender flight of stairs leads to another door. This woman has been climbing these same stairs for 11 years.

We walk into her office, which is covered in collegiate pennants and pictures of her family. There is a skylight above her desk that casts an angelic glow on her skin.

She is waiting for me to give directions. I tell her to go about her business while I set up and capture some footage of her in her environment. A nervous chuckle is her response.

The second the camera begins to record she squirms in her seat. She is uncomfortable when the spotlight is on her.

“I don’t see me as a hero or anything more than just a person trying to help the next person,” Perkins says with a tear in her eye.

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