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Laurel lawyer honored for student engineering program

Award recipient founded city science enrichment program

by Chidinma Okparanta, Staff Writer



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Laurel resident Andrea Evans remembers having a science lab in her Houston, Texas, elementary school, but couldn't find a similar opportunity for her 7-year-old daughter, Nya. So she decided to create her own.

Evans, 34, is founder and coordinator of KidGINEER, a weekend science enrichment program for children ages 5 to 10 in Laurel. She has been running the program for about a year and a half.

Her outreach efforts caught the attention of the National Bar Association, a group of African-American lawyers, judges and professors; and Washington, D.C.,-based IMPACT, a nonprofit that promotes community outreach among professionals. She was awarded July 31 as the 2011 Nation's Best Advocate Award for her professional and philanthropic efforts.

IMPACT spokeswoman Kiara Pesante said the two groups decided to jointly give out the award because of the membership overlap.

Pesante added that the goal of the award, which now is in its second year, is to encourage innovative outreach among professionals of color. A total of 250 lawyers under the age of 40 were nominated from across the country.

Evans, a patent attorney, runs her own law firm out of Columbia during the week while on the weekends she heads KidGINEER's hands-on workshops.

During the program's session on electricity in April, children built mini houses and used batteries and wires to install mini fans, porch lights and doorbells.

"It takes a lot of discipline to do what she does," said Arlington, Va. resident Paula Hairston, a retired judge, who was one of three people who nominated Evans. "To balance a private practice while being a wife and a mother then to go on weekends and put in these resources for the program she began is amazing."

Evans studied math at Spelman College and civil engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology.

"I really enjoyed science growing up and was good at it. My family encouraged me to study it," Evans said. "But I remember as a very young child it was always my dream to be a judge. I used to watch Peoples' Court so I think that's the first thing that inspired me to go into law."

After graduating with her math and engineering degrees in 1999, Evans decided to pursue a career in trademark and patent law and graduated from George Washington Law School in Washington, D.C., in 2002.

Evans wanted to instill the passion for inventing and exploring science in Nya and other Laurel students when she founded KidGINEER.

She began offering after-school engineering lessons and activities to about half a dozen students at her daughter's school, Bond Mill Elementary, in the spring of 2010.

As KidGINEER gained popularity with Laurel parents, Evans opened it up to all Laurel elementary school students and began holding the six-week sessions on weekends to better accommodate working parents.

“Children have this stigma that science and math are difficult,” Evans said. “But after KidGINEER the students think it’s fun, and they want to do well in school.”

Laurel resident Joni Wiredu said the program helped spark her 7-year-old daughter, Evelyn’s, interest in science.

“I don’t think she even really understands that she’s doing engineering,” he said. “To her it’s just fun stuff. She likes that when she mixes chemicals, a reaction happens. When she puts two wires together it makes a sound or creates light.”

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