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We will not regularly publish until Jan. 14, but look here for breaking news, sports updates and new classifieds until we return. Enjoy break!

Urban League coordinator works with local youth

Involvement leads to societal change, Bazzell says

Tanika Ely

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Online Poster

Editor's note: This is the first of four profiles featuring prominent local African-Americans in honor of Black History month.

On an average working day, Imani Bazzell wakes up at 5:30 in the morning to help her husband and three children, ages 17, 14 and eight, off to their destinations. By 8 a.m., she is at the office and begins her work that does not end until well into the evening.

Bazzell works as Baldrige In Education coordinator for the Urban League and as a community liaison for Parkland College. In addition to her work there, she conducts anti-racism workshops and is also the founder and director of SisterNet, a local network that emphasizes the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health of African-American women.

During the course of a week, she said she spends half of the time out of her office planning programs for different organizations - such as National African-American Parent Involvement Day, which she is coordinating for the Urban League to hold on Feb. 14. Bazzell also actively works to promote social justice both locally and internationally.

Bazzell has worked in the community with issues involving healthcare access, educational reform, racial justice, gender justice and leadership development. She also volunteers as host and producer for the local television show Black Perspectives, which is currently on hiatus.

Henry Radcliffe, director of Black Perspectives, said that as a parent, Bazzell has a tremendous dedication to the community and is constantly working with public schools.

"She uses a lot of energy to help youth," he said. "It's an inspiration that she can find the time."

"Imani is a passionate and devoted mother and puts in many hours of planning and coordinating," said Shawyn Williams, associate producer of Black Perspectives. "She is dedicated to helping the black community in any way she can."

Although Bazzell has lived in the Champaign-Urbana area for the past 21 years and has been involved in the community for at least 20 of them, she said she does not believe her own involvement is unique and says that everyone's involvement has considerable value.

"Everyone should have a voice," Bazzell said.

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As a student at Fisk University in Nashville, Tenn., Bazzell said she held particular interest in community-related issues and became involved in many school organizations, including student government.

"I never made a conscious decision to get involved," she said. "It's just something I knew was expected of me."

She said she wants to encourage as many people as possible to become involved in their community because it is the best way to achieve a participatory democracy - a society in which everyone has his or her own voice and their input is taken into consideration.

"The only way that democracy will work is if everyone actively participates," she explained. "And it's definitely achievable."

People should become involved because they will have an impact on the creation of policies that affect them personally, Bazzell said. It is not only limited to local communities but has an influence on wider society.

She said that some people may work toward this complicated goal without truly knowing if it can ever be achieved.

"I don't know what's possible in my lifetime," Bazzell said. "But my soul tells me that it's about making a difference and ensuring that my work

continues."

Several historical black leaders are important to Bazzell, especially during February, Black History Month. Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, who all worked for the common goal of achieving a more inclusive society, are an inspiring influence on Bazzell for the expense of their commitment.

To Bazzell, Black History Month is merely a temporary period set to establish and sustain the importance of black contributions that have shaped today's society. Bazzell said that she hopes one day there will not be a need to have a set month to celebrate black history because it will be regularly accepted and included year-round within a multicultural society.

Bazzell said she believes in order to build a better society, everyone should become involved in their community - not only those who are traditionally disenfranchised. She said it is especially important that youth get involved in creating their future.

"Young people should try to inform themselves and then voice their opinion," she said. "It can make a difference."

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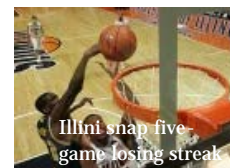
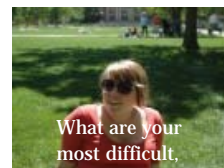
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