A Day For Dads, Families

By LENORA LAKE

Tribune correspondent

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UNIVERSITY AREA - Laregos Williams spent time just having a barbecue lunch with his 5-year-old son and talking to him about school, baseball and the food.

It was exactly what the first Father’s Day Luncheon Celebration at Mort NFL Youth Education Town Center was designed to accomplish.

Williams and Laregos Jr., a Robles Elementary School student, were two of about 75 guests at the June 14 event. The father said he came "because we need to spend time with our kids. A lot of the trouble is they don't have a father figure."

He added, "They see a lot of negative things, and we need to show them something positive."

The event was coordinated by the staff from the Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation & Conservation Department, which operates the center, and Erik Youngs, director of Education Group 101, which teaches a positive way of life through culinary skills. The organizers said fathers deserved recognition for setting good examples.

Youngs, a Town 'N Country resident who also heads the culinary arts program at Chamberlain High School, said: "We wanted to recognize fathers who are there. We so often beat up on those who aren't accessible."

The married father of a 7-year-old daughter added, "And we wanted to help the children to say thanks in a way they would not have been able to otherwise."

The organizers chose having a dinner. Trays of barbecued pork, steamed hot dogs, macaroni and cheese, baked beans, potato salad and watermelon lined the serving tables. Youngs and volunteers filled plates and cups for more than an hour.

Joe Troupe, community coordinator for the center, said he had been linked with Youngs through a board member for the center at 1815 E. 148th Ave, which received funding from the NFL as a result of the Super Bowl in Tampa in 2001.

Troupe hopes to offer culinary skills education at the center, and Youngs would like to turn Education Group 101 into a nonprofit organization to teach those skills.
Troupe said: "We wanted to uplift dads. I told him Youngs that. I wanted to do something for the fathers. He Youngs said, "Man, I can take care of you.'"

Not all the families attending had a father with them. In some cases, mothers, other relatives or family friends stood in.

Felicia Lyons brought a male friend along with her 7-year-old daughter, Autumn Lyons, a student at Mort Elementary School.

"We are here supporting her. We want her to know that she has a male involved in her life," Felicia Lyons said.

The event also featured musical entertainment and door prizes of store gift certificates, tickets to attractions, games, a Derrick Brooks-autographed mini helmet, wristwatches and brightly colored, shiny ties, which became the butt of jokes.

Troupe told the watch winners they had to take a tie, too.

After all, it was a Father's Day celebration.

Tribune correspondent Lenora Lake can be reached at (813) 865-4851 or llake@tampatrib.com.

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