

BUSINESS & MONEY

Black Business Helps Youth Gain Grounding In African Heritage

By Colin Rickards
Pride Contributing Writer

TORONTO, Ontario – State Farm Insurance, Warren Salmon's Black Board International and The United Way of Greater Toronto – TUWGT – have joined forces to create an imaginative educational program called the SOMA Community Initiative, to help raise awareness about Black history and culture.

"State Farm is providing funding that will allow 11 United Way-supported agencies, located throughout Toronto's neighbourhoods, to receive licences to use Black Board International's Ashaware Afrocentric Software," Salmon explained. "This neighbourhood-based initiative, which is focused on children and youths, aged 3 to 18, is aimed at improving reading and computer literacy skills, while building self-esteem, through awareness of Black culture and history."

Since 1990, Toronto-based Black Board International has provided culturally-related educational software and services, for use at home and in educational and learning institutes. Their line of software includes programs, in many different areas, for children and adults.

Salmon, the Chief Executive Officer of Blackboard International, creator of the computer software, explained that State Farm Insurance made "a generous donation" to TUWGT, specifying that the money be used to purchase and implement the BlackBoard International educational



Warren Salmon

software, for organizations and agencies, in a variety of high-needs areas.

"State Farm is proud to support this community initiative aimed at local children and youth," said Barbara Bellissimo, the company's Vice President, Operations. "We have a longstanding tradition of supporting our communities with safety and education programs. Being a good neighbour means actively supporting and improving our communities. By focusing on our children and youth, we are building for the future."

The SOMA Initiative was launched, last Friday, at the offices of Tropicana Community Services Organization, in Scarborough.

"It's appropriate to launch the SOMA Community Initiative during Black History Month, because the foundation of the content within the software is Black history," said Salmon. "I applaud State Farm and The United Way for recognizing the value of our software, which has been

designed to address many of the challenges facing Toronto, through its emphasis on positive role models and history-related content."

Blackboard International's programs have been matched with various Provincial curriculum standards, and have received recommendation for use in the home, and at all school levels, by a number of educators, in a variety of school- and home-based applications.

"Our work with youth is at the core of The United Way's commitment to making real change in our city, particularly in neighbourhoods in the innercity," said Earl Miller, a board member with TUWGT, and Chair of its African Canadian Committee.

"We hope the fruits of this partnership will engage African Canadian youth in their rich heritage, and encourage them to further explore the important contributions of Black people."

State Farm, which has been operating in Canada since 1938, is the second largest auto insurer in Ontario, and the fourth largest in the nation.

It is also the third largest property and casualty insurer in Ontario and fifth in Canada, with 460 agents currently providing insurance and financial services, from mutual funds and life insurance, to vehicle loans, home and auto insurance, in Alberta, New Brunswick and Ontario.

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