

Providing inspiration

► Two men were honored at the JEVS Human Services' Strictly Business Awards.

By Tom Waring

Northeast Times

Maurice Young and Gentil Ndizihwe have had two very different backgrounds, but they share inspirational stories.

In fact, both young men recently received an Inspiration Award at JEVS Human Services' 18th annual Strictly Business Awards at the Sheraton hotel in Center City.

Young, 26, is a graduate of the Human Services Program at Orleans Technical College, 2770 Red Lion Road. He grew up in Mount Airy as part of a nice family, but fell in with a bad crowd.

At age 18, he was shot twice in the head, but survived. Still, he spent two years in a wheelchair and had to learn to walk, speak, think and communicate all over again.

Eventually, he landed a minimum wage job. Then, his mom, Terri, saw an ad for the Human Services Program. He enrolled, and later earned a diploma.

"I aced it. I excelled in every course," he said.

Next, it was time to find a job, and he wanted to find something in the youth mentoring field.

"I've got to give back," he thought.

Today, he is a mental health technician at The Bridge, a substance abuse and mental health treatment program at 1100 Adams Ave. There, his enthusiasm is contagious.

The Bridge has hired 10 Human Services graduates since 2009.

"I'm happy. I've been there since March. I'm grateful. I love my job," Young said.

Receiving the Inspiration Award was special to him.

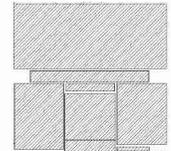
"I was surprised to be nominated. There are so many great stories you never know about," he said.

Bruce Wartman, director of the six-month Human Services Program, said graduation usually leads to employment.

"It gives students a leg up going into any area of human services," he said.

As for Ndizihwe, 21, he was born in Congo, but his family soon escaped that corrupt and war-torn African nation. He was raised in Rwanda and moved to Philadelphia in 2014. He lives in Burholme with his parents and four younger brothers and sisters.

At Orleans, he brought a strong work ethic to the JEVS Center for New Americans and was a student with Project World of Work (WOW).



In only four months, he earned his GED.

“After I got here, the language barrier was tough, but I passed the test,” he said.

Ndizihwe also collected a diploma in Property Maintenance and Repair. He started an interim packing job, but aspired for more.

Thanks to assistance from the Center for New Americans, he ultimately earned a full-time building maintenance position at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in King of Prussia. He’s looking to enroll in Community College of Philadelphia and eyeing a future in computer science or as an electrician.

“This is the beginning. I want to go to college. Hopefully, I’ll start in January,” he said. “I’ll get more experience and, after two years, move on to another college.”

Like Young, he appreciates being given the Inspiration Award. He wore a tuxedo to the luncheon.

“I’m surprised. I can’t believe this,” he said.

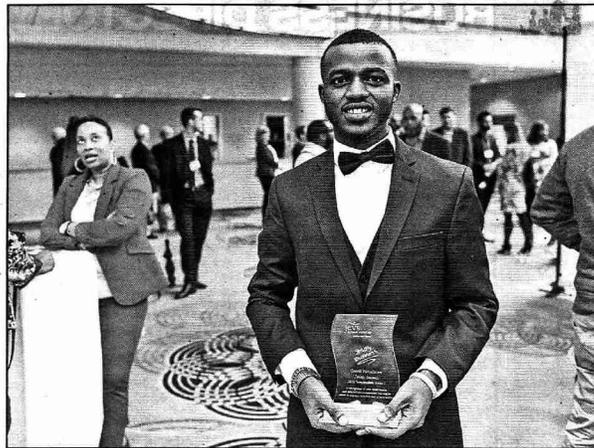
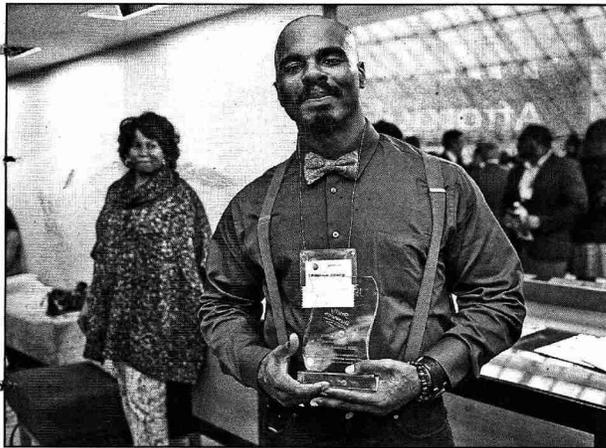
In attendance to cheer on Ndizihwe were Sylvia Ocasio, assistant program manager for Project WOW; GED instructor Denise Page; and property maintenance instructor Doug Moore.

Page described him as a determined student who helped others. Moore called him a “quick learner” and “wonderful student” who was often the first to arrive in class and the last to leave.

“He’s an amazing, brilliant young man,” Ocasio said.

Young and Ndizihwe were honored along with Joshua Shusterman, 26, who was born with cerebral palsy. Shusterman has worked with JEVS to find independent living and stable employment. ••

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MARIA YOUNG / TIMES PHOTOS

Getting down to business: Maurice Young (left) and Gentil Ndizihwe were honored at the JEVS Human Services’ 18th annual Strictly Business Awards at the Sheraton hotel in Center City.