

WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE

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Sunday, September 19, 2004

Participants in youth basketball league honored at awards dinner

By **DAVID THOMPSON**
Sun-Gazette Staff

The young athletes who were honored Saturday at First Church Christian Center for their participation in the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action summer basketball program received more than an education on the court. They learned valuable life lessons as well, said organizers.

The youth intervention and development project, formerly known as Kennedy-King

From left, Michael Hargrove-Troutman, Sharif Coleman and Knowledge Tyler enjoy themselves during the Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action awards banquet.



DAVID THOMPSON/Sun-Gazette

Youth Basketball League, uses basketball "as a carrot" to attract youth to the program, then teaches them life skills and self esteem, said supporter Faye Rozenblad.

"It is so vital," Rozenblad said. "If we don't get these kids at a young impressionable age, in a few years you're going to be reading that they're in the Bloods or Cripps. We'd rather have them mainstreaming in a real positive direction."

More than 120 boys and girls ages seven through 15 participated in the program this year. In addition to playing sports they attended workshops on conflict resolution, anti-bullying, gang prevention and HIV-AIDS awareness.

Other components of the program include a performing arts initiative, mentoring by

community volunteers, academic support for parents with at-risk children and a summer youth employment internship initiative which is under development.

The arts component, said organization founder Lonnie Gamble, is for young people who may not find their niche in athletics.

"Kids just need a direction and you never know what it's going to be," he said. "Music is a big part of our society."

Shariff Mercer performed a self-written though untitled, piece on the saxophone to a enthusiastic response from the audience. Trophies were presented to supporters, coaches and mentors and, of course, all of the young athletes. Gamble said that each young person who participated in the program was a winner.