

NAACP event raises funds, awareness

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HUNTINGTON — Honesty is the best and only policy when it comes to addressing the problems of any society, according to Patricia Kusimo, president and CEO of the Education Alliance.

Kusimo was the featured speaker at the NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet at Marshall University, where more than 100 people gathered for what annually is Huntington-Cabell Branch's largest fundraiser and meeting.

The theme of the event was "Affirming America's Promise," which goes hand-in-hand with the main focuses of the branch, and includes education, health care, employment and the criminal justice system, said Sylvia Ridgeway, president of the Huntington- Cabell Branch.

"We have these focuses because they are things we feel as an organization people should be focusing on," Ridgeway said. "The goal of the evening is that everyone leaves here with more information about what's going on than they came in with."

The Education Alliance is a statewide, nonprofit research and K-12 public education fund dedicated to preparing West Virginia students for post secondary education and career opportunities, and as CEO of the organization, Kusimo has plenty of experience taking on tough issues.

"When it comes to the people and things we love, we have to tell the truth. No one can ever improve their environment without the correct information," Kusimo said. "One of the things that is working so well here is this group's focus on its youth. Engaging youth is absolutely key to engaging a community."

In addition to awarding three scholarships to graduating seniors, the Huntington-Cabell Branch recently restored its NAACP Youth Board.

The Youth Board, which was reinstated in 2010, already has made an impact by organizing youth-focused community activities, said the board's president, Justin Phillips, a 17-year old senior at Huntington High School.

Phillips said he hoped that by representing the NAACP he would be able to help his peers share their thoughts for their community.

"I hope the youth, when they see us, know they have an outlet to let their voices be heard," Phillips said. "When they see problems in the community, they should know they can use our group as a way to let their voice be known."