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**Section:** Local

### **Sacred SISTAHS** helps mentor area's girls

*Imani Tate, Staff Writer*

As a young girl, Dr. Tonia Causey-Bush of Fontana relied upon the strength and wisdom of elders to help her maneuver around obstacles and discover opportunities. As an adult, she's making sure she does the same for adolescent girls trying to find their personal, academic and spiritual identities.

When Causey-Bush founded **Sacred SISTAHS**, a nonprofit educational enrichment and mentoring organization, she was thinking about her grandmother, Irmatean Causey, and the impact the elder made on young relatives and community children.

"SISTAHS is an acronym for Sisters In Solidarity Teaching And Healing our Spirits," explained the Ganesha High School graduate and Rialto Unified School District's director of research, evaluation and accountability.

Like many people born and raised in the South, Causey-Bush noted family folks and residents of Baton Rouge, La., knew most people by nicknames rather than their formal ones. Causey was called Sister. Her granddaughter used a derivative of that to come up with the name of the organization she founded in Texas in 2001.

"My grandmother wasn't the oldest of her sisters and family, but she was the most admired," Causey-Bush said, smiling as she reflected on tender memories created by her nana. "Her prayers got me through the dark times. She was always there to let me know there was light at the end of the tunnel.

"She always encouraged me and told me I would make it. It was just a matter of time. My mother had received that same encouragement and was the first in our family to attend college when she went to Southern University. I was the first person on my mother's side to complete college."

Causey-Bush earned a bachelor's degree in cultural anthropology from UC Berkeley, a master's in education at Columbia University, a master's in educational administration at Cal State San Bernardino and a Ph.D in human development at Claremont Graduate University.

And she did it all as a super-academic achiever.

Causey-Bush said she wasn't a mischievous child who got into trouble at home or school, but she did experience her share of

troubles growing up. Family and community mentors put and kept loving hands on her to keep her on the good side of the road.

Fit-For-Fall walk-a-thon

8:30 to 11:30 a.m. at Red Hill Community Park in Rancho Cucamonga.

The \$25 entry fee includes participation and a T-shirt.

Proceeds benefit the Quality Toddlers Preparatory and Junior High School in Ghana and scholarships for California girls.

Online registration can be completed at [www.sacredsistahsinc.org/newsevents.html](http://www.sacredsistahsinc.org/newsevents.html).

She never forgot that nurturing.

**Sacred SISTAHS** is her answer to the need to keep young girls on the right track by giving them social and spiritual guidance.

Causey-Bush believes education, cultural enlightenment, personal awareness and spiritual stability are the best steppingstones to success, said the Rev. La Quetta Bush-Simmons, the **Sacred SISTAHS'** first scholarship dinner keynote speaker.

Like her grandmother and mother, Constance Causey Boykin, Causey-Bush models behavior, Bush-Simmons said, and she doesn't limit it to her daughters Chioma and Thandiwe and son Lawson VI.

"She is an extraordinary woman who has dedicated her life to nurturing children and helping them understand their cultural and spiritual legacies," said Bush-Simmons, co-pastor of Rancho Cucamonga's Immanuel Praise Fellowship.

"Dr. Causey-Bush is unselfish, generous, kind and brilliant," she continued. **Sacred SISTAHS** provide mature women opportunities to share their gifts, talents and knowledge with young women and create an extended family that many young girls are missing today."

Causey-Bush and her husband - Dr. Lawson Bush V, Cal State Los Angeles/UC Irvine Joint Doctoral Program director - were teaching at Texas Tech University when she founded **Sacred SISTAHS**.

The couple refused to sit on their hands and rhetorically complain about the lack of cultural awareness in a marginalized community. They joined the university's Black Faculty and Staff Association, enmeshed themselves in community programs and acted as catalysts for more.

They brought the first Black History Month program to East Lubbock as well as educationally enriching presentations by such notables as world-renowned scholar Asa Hilliard, Georgia State University's Fuller E. Callaway professor of urban education, and Dr. Anthony Browder, author of African history books.

Returning to California in 2002, she expanded **Sacred SISTAHS** and secured nonprofit status.

"SISTAHS is not just ebonics. The name has a significant meaning and purpose," she said.

It's also a personal matter for her.

"I have to make sure all the chances I was given are also given to every person, especially girls, I encounter," Causey-Bush said. "It's the same charge my mother, grandmother and all the women in my first and extended families felt and feel."

No one accomplishes anything alone, she said.

"You draw upon the strength, expertise and experiences of those who came before you," the mentor said. "When you do, you gain greater insight into yourself and your legacy, realize your responsibilities are not limited to you and extend yourself so your effort can benefit everyone else.

"We all stand on the shoulders of others," she continued. "Whatever we have or achieve is not just because of one thing we did, but because others made sacrifices for us to have and achieve."

Girls today grapple with more societal and personal problems than girls did in years past, she said.

Six "sisters" share her sense of responsibility and link arms, hearts and spirits to mentor girls to social and spiritual maturity.

The mentors who began with four middle-school girls in 2004 and now help 63 are Jerilyn Boykin of Texas, a Neiman-Marcus Corp. research and marketing analyst; Jenise Bush of San Bernardino, associate director of Rialto Unified School District's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs/Inland Empire; publishing company consultant Elaine Jefferson of Diamond Bar; clinical hypnotherapist Akua Maat of Lake Elsinore; Sadikisha Majadi of Rancho Cucamonga, an AETNA senior systems analyst, and home school teacher Ivonov McLeod of Upland.

**Sacred SISTAHS** recently presented scholarships to three of the original four girls mentored. The girls - Folashade Alford, Jade Ellis and Kristin Udenze - are respectively freshmen at Cal State Long Beach, Michigan State University and Southwestern Christian College. Nailah Faraji, the fourth girl, is now an Upland High School senior.

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