

WHAT'S YOUR PROJECT?

Tonight's the night. The young women who are part of life skills program through Sisters Together Achieving Results Inc., or STAR, will be the stars of the 10th annual Debutante Cotillion at 5 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency downtown.

The age-old right of passage and the works of the organization as a whole strive to develop the next generation of leaders. Two Saturdays a month, the high school girls attended workshops on such topics as academic awareness and career exploration. They also have been involved in community service projects.

"It's not always about the self. It's about helping others," says Keischa Higdon, founder and CEO of STAR Inc.

The cotillion is a traditional debut of these girls, with a formal introduction, a musical serenade, sitdown dinner, a dance with their escorts and a candlelit ceremony. The Debutante of the Year award also will be presented at the event, which draws many alumnae of the program.

STAR started in 2000 when Higdon was studying for her master's degree at Roberts Wesleyan College. As part of her work, she created a business plan for STAR, which was incorporated in 2002.

Executive founders Higdon, Diane E. Bowens, Tonya L. Barnes and Sonya L. Lawhorn call themselves star polishers. Their goal as mentors is to nurture and enhance principles of integrity, honesty, fairness, hard work, dedica-



From left, Keischa J. Higdon, Diane E. Bowens, Tonya L. Barnes and Sonya L. Lawhorn. PROVIDED PHOTO

tion, love and respect for others.

"We want them to make better and wiser choices and go beyond where we have come," says Higdon of Rochester.

In addition to her work with STAR, Higdon is involved in the North Greece Road Church of Christ, where she teaches Sunday school and is a young adult team leader. Higdon is also part of the Black Women's Leadership Forum, Rochester ABOVE, Metropolitan Woman's Network and the African American Leadership Program.

For more information on STAR, or to become a future debutante, call (585) 234-0448 or go to sisterstogether.org.

— Meagan Holung