

On Wednesday, June 29 2011, current and former participants of FIU's *Educational Leadership Enhancement Program*, now entering its 18th year, gathered at the Kovens Conference Center in FIU's Biscayne Bay Campus for the 10th *Annual Reunion and Luncheon*. The event brought together over 60 participants for a half-day of networking, sharing accomplishments, and hearing from a distinguished leader in higher education.

The reunion began early with a networking session, which gave everyone an opportunity to catch up with old friends and colleagues and meet some of the more recent program participants. Following this session, and in what has become a tradition at each reunion, Program Director Barbara Bader, offered a brief history of the program, making notable mention of those key individuals who have contributed to the program's endurance and success throughout the years.

Another tradition—and now one of the highlights of each reunion—followed with each participant introducing her-/himself and sharing any professional or personal milestones. While some participants offered humorous anecdotes and special memories of their time in the program, others beamed when announcing the completion of a dissertation, a job promotion, or even a daughter's high school graduation. And still others, many others, offered praise to Barbara Bader for her steadfast leadership and enduring mentorship. Regardless of what each person revealed, one thing was clear: everyone appeared genuinely united by a supportive force that is deeply rooted in the program's transformative powers. As one participant so aptly noted in her own introduction, "I just love the energy in this room, it's truly inspiring."

Undoubtedly, *the* highlight of the reunion was the opportunity to hear from Dr. Shirley R. Pippins. With an illustrious 25-year career that has included some notable "firsts," Dr. Pippins shared her experiences and insights with great candor and humility. During a special question-and-answer session, Dr. Pippins had the opportunity to interact with participants and share some memorable and invaluable words of wisdom. Some highlights follow:

Be overly prepared so you can take advantage of opportunities. Listen actively and pay attention to your institution's culture. Establish a collective vision. Develop a base constituency in the community. What is uncomfortable for you now becomes easier with time, and so you learn to overcome by simply knowing this. Change occurs from the inside first. Do not worry or invest too much time in the 20% of people you will never "win over." Your faith, values, family, and close friendships will sustain you during difficult times, nurture them often.

The event concluded with a wonderful lunch overlooking picturesque Biscayne Bay, and a message of gratitude and celebration from Barbara, who announced that the event had raised \$2,605 for FIU's First-Generation Scholarships, an amount that will be doubled to \$5210 following the addition of the State's matching funds. In true service-leadership tradition, the current and future leaders gave back to FIU in honor of what they had received by participating in the *Educational Leadership Enhancement Program*.

Cheers,

J. Valdés, Ed.D. (2009-2010 cohort)