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## Businessman offers internship to Fas Trac

JOSH O'LEARY • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • DECEMBER 14, 2010

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Ginsberg, who sat down with Harper and a group of Fas Trac students for a roundtable discussion in the fall, says he understands why that perception exists.



City High senior Stephanie Reyes, 18, dusts, answers phones, cleans jewelry and restocks merchandise as part of the Fas Trac program Wednesday at M.C. Ginsberg. (Press-Citizen / Benjamin Roberts)

"I like to think that everybody seems to be inclusive," Ginsberg said. "But when it gets right down to it, I think we have our prejudices. We speak to inclusiveness, but there are a lot of people down here that are much more conservative in our philosophies than I would have guessed.

"But I think people are open to the idea. It just takes one to change a culture. The ripples extend. We've thrown a little pebble into the water and we'll see what kind of response we get."

Fas Trac is a three-year old program Harper began at City High to help black, at-risk teens succeed in high school and eventually move onto college. It has since become part of the Mayor's Youth Empowerment Program, and although still largely made up of black youths, Fas Trac now is open to area students of all ethnicities from fourth through 12th grade.

Ginsberg and Harper had hoped to partner with the Downtown Association, a group that advocates for downtown businesses, to establish an internship program, but the group declined.

DTA executive director Nick Arnold is supportive of the idea, but he says given the group's resources and with its primary focus on coordinating downtown events, it wasn't feasible. Arnold says that downtown businesses strive to make the area an inviting gathering spot for the entire community.

"It's unfortunate if that feeling is out there, and we absolutely want to figure out ways to make them feel welcome," Arnold said.

Ginsberg is the only downtown business owner who has teamed with Fas Trac to date, but Harper said he is working to make similar arrangements with a couple of others interested in taking on interns soon.

For Reyes, the job at M.C. Ginsberg is an exciting new opportunity, and she said other students would benefit from similar internships.

"I'm learning interesting things here," she said. "So it's really good."

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