

KENTUCKY SUNDAY

YOUR MONEY \$UNDAY — D4

Lexington housing program welcomes new applicants

See who's celebrating what — D5

"We never credit the mountains enough for helping shape who we are, for giving us a specific lens through which to see the world, a lens to nurture what we have to say about our human presence in it."

Nikky Finney, National Book Award winner for poetry

Lexington helping generate literary capital

CARNEGIE CENTER FOSTERS AND MARKETS KENTUCKY'S WEALTH OF AUTHORS



TOM EBLEN
HERALD-LEADER
COLUMNIST

Tens of thousands of Kentuckians were focused last Tuesday night on cheering for the Wildcats as they thrashed the Florida Gators.

A few blocks away from a packed Rupp Arena, the Carnegie Center for Literacy & Learning also was filled to

IF YOU GO

What: Join the Carnegie Center staff for a community conversation about becoming the Literary Arts Capital of Mid-America.

When: 6 p.m. Thursday

Where: Carnegie Center for Literacy & Learning, 251 W. Second St.

capacity. The standing-room-only crowd of more than 200 was there to cheer for local writers. Basketball isn't the

only pursuit where Kentuckians play at the top of the game.

Ed McClanahan read a hilarious tale of adolescent angst from his new retrospective collection, *I Just Hitched in from the Coast*. Bobbie Ann Mason read from her new novel, *The Girl in the Blue Beret*. Nikky Finney read from her new poetry collection, *Head Off & Split*, which recently won the National Book Award. Before

the all-stars took the microphone, several aspiring writers read from their works.

Finney's National Book Award — and the viral Internet video of her amazing acceptance speech — could not have come at a better time for a new Carnegie Center initiative. Neil Chethik, the center's new director, has proclaimed Lexington the Literary Capital of Mid-America and the Carnegie Center as its statehouse.

"It's not as if we're trying

See **EBLEN, D3**



Nikky Finney read from her collection *Head Off & Split*, which recently won the National Book Award for poetry, on Tuesday at a Carnegie Center event.

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Jennifer Doan, a sophomore, said the First Scholar program helped her through a difficult first month at the University of Kentucky.

Some UK students get extra guidance

FIRST-GENERATION FRESHMEN ARE TARGETED

By **Linda B. Blackford**
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In 2009, a Texas-based foundation chose the University of Kentucky for an extremely targeted pilot program: Take 20 incoming freshmen whose parents never had any college classes, and help the students through.

Mentor them academically and socially. Give them scholarships to ease the financial burden. Make sure the students from Kentucky meet and talk with professors and help with the unique challenges that face those who aren't familiar with the culture of college.

In fall 2010, the inaugural First Scholars group, financed with \$800,000 from the Suder Foundation, arrived in Lexington.

By fall 2011, every one of those students was still enrolled. That 100 percent retention rate compared to 82 percent retention in general at UK, and 74 percent for first-generation students.

Matthew Deffendall, the first director of First Scholars, couldn't help thinking about ways to duplicate

See **UK FIRSTS, D3**

STEPPING UP

Being part of team motivates students to take pride in school and studies



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PHOTOS BY **MARK CORNELISON** | mcornelison@herald-leader.com

Deja Dennis and the Tates Creek High School step team have been practicing for the TCHS Step Show Extravaganza Exhibition, scheduled for Feb. 25.



MERLENE DAVIS
HERALD-LEADER
COLUMNIST

Toward the end of her freshman year at Tates Creek High School, Kiearra Brown began slacking off at school, and her grades reflected it. Fortunately, the school has a step team, which served as a life preserver that not only pulled Kiearra, now a senior, back on track but has kept her there.

"The threat of being kicked off the team made me bring my grades up," said Kiearra, 17. "If there was no step team, I don't think I would do anything. This is me. It fits my personality."

The Tates Creek High School step team, formerly called The Untouchables, is an extracurricular activity that gives some students a reason to connect with their school, just as an academic team or a drama club can. Members must meet certain grade and attendance policies to participate. Established in fall 2001, the team, one of many in Lexington, is open to all students, but it seems to appeal particularly to black students and to girls.

"I love to step," said Tates Creek junior Brandi Lindsey, 17. "It is different. You get a chance to dance and put scenes together and can tell stories with the routines."

Thirteen middle school and high school teams, and possibly some col-

See **DAVIS, D2**



David Clark, who also runs the school's Transition Program for at-risk students, has been the Tates Creek High step team sponsor since it began in 2001.

Kentucky.com

Online: Watch a video of the TCHS step team practice and see a photo gallery.

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