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Three leadership experts speak at UR

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By Katherine Calos

Bronx was so bright that his nickname was "Stein," short for Einstein. He got a full scholarship to Brown University, but six months later he was back at home.

"I never would have dropped out if I had my posse with me," he said.

For Deborah Bial of New York City, a light bulb went off. "Why not send posses to college together so young people can back each other up? They're a little less likely to turn around and come home."

In 1989, the first posse of five students went from New York to Vanderbilt University, and The Posse Foundation was born. Since then, Posse has sent 3,110 scholars from six cities to top-tier colleges and universities across the country and achieved a 90 percent graduation rate.

Bial, president and founder, was one of the speakers yesterday at this year's final Jepson Leadership Forum at the University of Richmond. The theme was "Private Money/Public Causes: Leadership, Philanthropy and the Common Good."

Joining her were Leigh Carter, executive director of Fonkoze USA, which raises money for microfinance loans and support in Haiti; and Patricia M.C. Brown, a UR graduate who is president of Johns Hopkins HealthCare.

All have had a major impact on the communities they serve, in many cases by forming support groups within the communities.

In Haiti, Fonkoze focuses on small loans to rural women in groups of five, with each of the five responsible for making sure that all five loans are repaid, Carter said. The stairway out of poverty begins with loans of as little as \$10 and programs to help the "catastrophically poor" who may not be able to handle even that much.

Education, literacy and health care are also key parts of a program that she describes as bringing economic democracy to the island.

"It's way more than microcredit," she said. "We meet women wherever they are in their life. Sometimes they fall off, and we pull them back."

Brown said Johns Hopkins HealthCare may be in the forefront of a transition in health care from a hospital-centered system to a patient-centered system. The managed-care network has 200,000 individuals enrolled.

Major donors to such institutions as Johns Hopkins seem to be impatient now, she said. Instead of a building that will carry their names, they want to eliminate a disease.

The next shift in philosophy may be to combat the conditions that contribute to chronic diseases. Solving such lifestyle issues as smoking, obesity, poor diet and lack of exercise is "almost more daunting," she said.

She doesn't view recently enacted health reforms as leading toward a system of socialized medicine.

"A balance will be achieved," she said, with "appropriate roles for government, business and philanthropists -- you, me and the rich guys."