

Through collaboration with the Broadway Heights Community Council and the BHCC's Youth Leadership Team, a multigenerational "Tour Across American" emerged. Robert Robinson, a community activist who has lived in east San Diego for years, wanted the children of his neighborhood to have a greater appreciation for the sacrifices black Americans made during the civil rights movement. He got the idea to take them on cross-country trip to visit historic places, particularly those with special meaning for black Americans. With co-facilitators Robert and his wife Barbara, the tour left on July 10 for a 5,640 mile tour of the country and returned on July 25. After a year of meetings, 23 youths, 10 adults and 18 seniors, hit the road. Youth involved in the program learned about it through the community and by being involved in the Broadway Heights Youth Community Leadership group. Their ages ranged from 3rd graders to a second year college student. Neighborhood programs dedicated their time to ensure the word get out about their program every chance they could. Most of the adults going on the trip are parents or grandparents of the youth while some are community members. The 18 senior volunteers became involved in the Broadway Heights Community program because they were already on the neighborhood council. The trip was offered to anyone in the neighborhood through the Broadway Heights newsletter and at the monthly youth and Neighborhood council meeting. Before going on the trip, all participants were required to participate and attend many meetings and workshops. These events ranged from SAT and PSAT prep course, organizational planning, fundraisers, dining and theatre etiquette. Everyone involved in the group was held to the same expectations, though the adults went through more training in terms of learning how to mentor and tutor the youth.

During the educational tour, the Youth Leadership Team and their assigned Senior Mentors experienced firsthand information related to the Civil Rights Movement by visiting the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the King Center in Atlanta, GA, Civil War Battlefields, Petersburg, Virginia, Little Rock Arkansas, Central High School, Capitol Hill Washington DC, Arlington National Cemetery where they laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers, Howard University, saw 'The Phantom of the Opera' at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Washington Memorial, WW2 Memorial, the Native American Museum in DC, Air & Space Museum, lunch meeting with Congressman Bob Filner (D-CA) and Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), the first Muslim Congress person Keith Ellison (D-MN), Georgia Aquarium, Tuskegee Airfields, Graceland, the Lorraine Motel Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN, and Voting Rights Museum in Selma AL. Many travelers were able to meet with relatives in various states along the way. In addition, the multigenerational teams explored college campuses, participated in designated activities, and discussed the importance of utilizing education as a mechanism to effect social change.

Following the tour the group hopes to put together a documentary video with assistance from the Jacobs Center, including interviews with the youth and seniors. They also hope to put together written documentation and would like to do oral presentations to groups. With the help of the Lemon Grove School District, who loaned 10 laptop computers and 10 digital cameras and set-up a Web Site for the “Tour Across American”, the youth, adults and seniors were able to document the trip on a daily basis.

The group met and had fellowship at three churches: in Memphis TN, Greenville SC and Atlanta GA giving opportunities for multigenerational exchanges, games, food and dialog. The Youth Leadership Team and the seniors also had the opportunity to sit in the gallery and look down on the congressional Session in the House of Representatives, to see how our government works, to show the possibilities to our youth.

The group was successful in developing loving, caring, respectful relationships among the youth members, adults and the senior adults, meeting their goals for intergenerational friendship, as a result:

- One woman will be the Big Sister of a teenage girl living with a grandparent. One man has agreed to be the Big Brother of a youth in the neighborhood.

The group operates smoothly and efficiently as regards to luggage, packing, cleaning of the bus, unloading of two wheelchairs at stops with combined youth and adult team working together. Morning started on the bus with an open microphone.

They sang songs, said prayers, shared information, apologized for past experiences without being asked, children and youth thanked moms and dads and grandparents, played together at rest stops, and enjoying being together! One of the most pleasant surprises of the trip was the reaction of the people that they met along the way. Strangers came up after watching the layer of the wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. They wanted to know who the group was and how they could do the same thing. Many commented that the Broadway Heights neighborhood sounded like the “old neighborhood” that they grew up in ... before neighborhoods changed, and people stopped knowing the person next door. The group was fortunate to meet people that went the extra mile. Who taught things because they loved to teach and wanted them to know what History really is.

People like:

Ranger Grant Gates at the National Petersburg VA Civil Rights Battlefield. He researched the Civil rights story at Lemon Grove’s own Roberto Alvarez and his 1935 fight to be able to go to school as a student of Mexican descent, something he was

denied right here in San Diego County. It was a lesson in “freedom”, taught in a field in Virginia. He took the extra step!

People like:

Joanne Bland in Selma AL, who as a eleven year old girl was on the of the Voting Rights Marchers in 1965 that was stopped at the Edmund Pettus Bridge with beating and vicious dogs. She shared her story, as if it were yesterday, her passion for “freedom”, just as strong today. She took the extra step!

People like:

The Professor at Howard University in Washington DC who wants the Broadway Heights youth to have a good education, so she broke it down for them, the ins and outs of being successful at high school and college. She arranged join meetings with a gifted class from local school to meet Broadway Heights youth. She took the extra step!