

2009 Project Success “New York National Conference Trip” Evaluation
By: Brian Olatunji

The 2008/09 Project Success culminated the year in grand fashion by taking 12 Southeastern High School of Technology students to the annual 100 Black Men National Conference in New York, NY.

To much delight of the 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit membership we were able to award the 12 students with an all expense paid trip to the capitol of the world, “New York.” Seven of the 12 students, who earned the trip, were also in attendance during the 2008 national conference in Orlando, FL. This is a testament to the impact, value and progress of the Project Success program. Our goal is to increase the graduation rate of the young men we mentor and this culminating activity reinforces and implements the lessons learned throughout the school year by the young men. Lead by the contingent of Brian Olatunji, Robert Barksdale, Kenny Dodson and Anton Chastang according to individual accounts from the students this was their most memorable experience to date.

The conference was held at the New York Hilton located in mid-town Manhattan and gave the students the most authentic New York experience with their sights set on improving their lives to ultimately one day pay it forward themselves. There were a multitude of activities which included; educational workshops highlighting collegiate experience such as “Standing out in a crowd,” The State of HBCU’s, a roundtable with several current HBCU Presidents, an education town hall presented by Scholastic, Inc. and “The Art of Design” workshop presented by representatives from Nike, General Motors and U.S. Army.

Other activities included a memorable photo opportunity of the collective youth from all over the world in Times Square, police guided subway voyage from mid-town Manhattan to Harlem. Once we arrived in Harlem students enjoyed breakfast at the world famous “Apollo” theater as well as a guided tour of the facility. Our young men from Detroit were singled out by way of their uniform attire which gave them the opportunity to perform on one of the world’s most famous stages as a group. One of our very own “Moses Hubert” also took the challenge along with approximately 10 other young people to perform in front of the packed house of 100 mentee’s and their chaperones.

Students were treated to lower level seating at “The Lion King” Broadway play on Broadway. Initially this activity was met with resistance, however once the show concluded each of our young men expressed their delight and overall enjoyment of the show. One of our goals is to broaden the perspectives of our youth by introducing them to new experiences. Two words... “Mission Accomplished!”

As you can see there were many activities to keep our youth occupied, however we would have been remiss to visit the big apple and not visit lady liberty. This was accomplished by way of a private dinner cruise on the Hudson River courtesy of one of the 100’s own. Not only was dinner provided on board, there was also a two story youth

party where our young men were truly the life of the party. To say they had a great time is beyond an understatement.

During daily conference wide luncheon's students were treated to keynote speaker's; Allan Houston (recently retired NBA player) and Kevin Liles (VP of AOL Time Warner Music Group) as well as a private movie showing of "Bring Your A Game" produced by Mario Van Peoples where Mario was in attendance to present the showing.

We also took advantage of what little down time we had by visiting the various stores in Manhattan with a little shopping as well as a walk through a portion of Central Park.

Of all the activities there was one which stood out as the marquee for our group which took place during the annual "Report from our Youth Luncheon." This is where two of our young men; Justin Alexander and Moses Hubert were on stage to present during the program. Both made the sacrifices and time commitments necessary throughout the conference to not only participate but have speaking roles during the luncheon. Members of our chapter should be proud to have outstanding young men representing us.

Last but certainly not least was the now 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit tradition of the "autograph, please" competition where students obtain autographs from members of various chapters. This activity serves a dual purpose of fostering networking skills for our youth as well as giving them a form to compete for prizes. The winners of the contest were Justin Alexander (11th grader) and Mario Hill (10th grader). Each student was presented with an autographed football and baseball from NFL standout Boomer Esiason and MLB Cy Young award winner Jake Peavy.

My assessment of the overall trip was extremely positive. I consider the engagement amongst the youth (ours as well as others), the opportunity to travel outside of their normal environment, and their exposure to networking with their interaction with various members of 100 chapters nation wide through the "autograph, please" competition the most vital and influential aspects of the trip. Given my involvement with our young men over the past year, witnessing the maturity of the students is a surreal experience and gives me hope we are contributing to the development of these young men.

I am truly looking forward to another successful year of the Project Success program as well as continued interaction with our youth!