



Current Students
Prospective Students
Alumni & Friends
Faculty & Staff

- ▶ [About PVAMU](#)
- ▶ [Athletics](#)
- ▶ [John B. Coleman Library](#)
- ▶ [Research & Development](#)
- ▶ [Forms, Policies & Reports](#)
- ▶ [Online Services](#)
- ▶ [PVAMU Administration](#)
- ▶ [Veterans Affairs](#)

[Home](#) » [Prairie View A&M University News](#)

PVAMU 4-H Team Featured In White House Roundtable

Wednesday, December 17, 2008



WASHINGTON, D.C.--(Dec. 5)-- Prairie View A&M University prospective students recently participated in The U.S. White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives' *Compassion in Action* Roundtable meeting titled, *The Next Generation of Social Entrepreneurship*.

The panel included Russell Hebert, a member of Prairie View Cooperative Extension's All American 4-H Club in Fort Bend County and founding member of the *All American Youth Rodeo Association* in Fresno, Texas.

"These *Compassion in Action* Roundtables have been held monthly since January 2007 to highlight organizations, programs and policies addressing critical social needs," said Gail Long, program specialist, 4-H & Youth, Cooperative Extension Program. "This event was the final Roundtable in the *Compassion in Action* series and spotlighted the innovative leadership of an emerging generation of social entrepreneurs in America."

The event brought together young people from across the nation who are leading creative philanthropic efforts to address poverty, disease and a range of other critical needs that are affecting not only individuals and communities in America but also individuals around the world.

"I had an opportunity to meet Russell and two of his friends from Fresno, Ashley Jones and Sheldon Nixon, as a result of their involvement in Cooperative Extension's Engaging Youth, Serving Community (EYSC) Project," said Long, who coordinates the EYSC at Prairie View. "This was truly an honor to be selected by the White House to participate in such a worthy cause. Being given an opportunity to dialogue with policymakers, government officials, philanthropists and faith-based organizations solidify the fact that our youth are doing outstanding things in their communities."

Long and Timothy Sandles, Cooperative Extension Program 4-H & Youth agent in Fort Bend County accompanied Russell, Ashley and Sheldon to Washington, D.C.

Russell, Ashley and Sheldon were invited to the *Compassion in Action* Roundtable because of their motivation to create an organization to help the youth in Fresno, Texas, who were headed towards a path of trouble.

"Growing up in the small town of Fresno, Texas, not far from Houston, where roaming the streets and getting into trouble is fairly easy, gave me and my best friend, Tim Bonner, the desire to establish the All American Youth Rodeo Association in 2004," said Russell. "Participation in rodeos and trail rides has become a part of our community's involvement to help entertain and keep youth off the streets. In my community many youth come from broken homes and some lack parental and financial support."

When Russell's friend and co-founder of the All American Youth Rodeo Association, Tim Bonner lost his life to violence in 2006, his desire to keep youth in his community from going down the wrong path became even stronger. To honor Tim's memory, Russell, Ashley and another friend, Sheldon, all of whom attend Hightower High School in Fresno, started fulfilling the association's mission of providing youth a meaningful opportunity to be involved in organized rodeo competition and to expose them to the field of agriculture.

The three friends started holding 4-day rodeo camps in their community where young people learn skills in equine, equestrian, roping, bull riding and barrel racing. After participants complete the camp sessions, a series of rodeos and exhibitions are held.

Workshops and seminars about the importance of education, career development and enhancing life and social skills are also conducted during the rodeo camp. Russell, Ashley and Sheldon have also partnered with the Cooperative Extension Program at Prairie View A&M University to establish the All American 4-H Club in Fort Bend County to promote leadership and life skills to their peers.

"We are extremely proud of this group of young people," said Sandles. "With support of the Engaging Youth, Serving Community project, this 4-H Club has designed and erected a sign in their community that says *Welcome to Fresno*. Before this happened, there was no sign to distinguish that Fresno actually existed."

"The EYSC is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and the National 4-H Council to provide youth with leadership and community enhancement opportunities," said Long. "EYSC is a youth/adult partnership project where youth voice their opinions and ideas and are recognized as equal partners. Russell, Ashley and Sheldon are really making a difference in their community."

Russell took part in the second *Compassion in Action* panel discussion with five other outstanding youth from across the United States: Brittany and Robbie Bergquist, founders, Cell Phones for Soldiers; Sidra Kalsoom, founder, Milagros; project coordinator, Spread the Dough; Cally Robertson, founder, Thai Totes; and Jaime Colman, Walk Humbly. Anita McBride, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady, The White House, moderated the panel discussion. A total of 14 young people participated in the *Compassion in Action* Roundtable panel discussions.

For more information about the *Compassion in Action* Roundtable, The All American Youth Rodeo Association and

the All American 4-H Club, contact Gail Long at (936) 261-5119, glong@ag.tamu.edu or Timothy Sandles at (281) 342-3034, tsandles@ag.tamu.edu.



Pictured (left to right): Jedd Medefind, Special Assistant to the President and Acting Director, Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, The White House; and Fort Bend County PVAMU Roundtable attendees, Russell Hebert, Sheldon Dixon and Ashley Jones. 2008
Photo Courtesy: PVAMU Cooperative Extension Program



Russell Hebert, (second from left), is pictured with fellow Roundtable panel members, Sidra Kalsoom, Robbie and Brittany Bergquist, Jaime Colman and Cally Robertson. 2008
Photo Courtesy: PVAMU Cooperative Extension Program

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[Go to the Index...](#)

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