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PVAMU ACCESS Students Restore Emmett Till Center and Park in Miss.

Wednesday, August 13, 2008



GLENDORA, Miss.-- Students and staff from Mississippi Valley State and Prairie View A&M universities recently joined forces for hands-on experience in history-making.

Despite the fact the two historic African-American institutions of higher learning are fierce rivals in the Southwestern Athletic Conference, from July 27-29 they were eager compatriots in a historic joint effort in the mostly black hamlet.

A group of 101 students and 31 staffers from Prairie View, Texas, participated in the construction, renovation, beautification and cleanup project with an estimated 100 students and faculty members from the Itta Bena school.

"What's happening with this project is unprecedented for a town the size of Glendora and for Mississippi Valley State University," said Dr. Marvin Haire, interim director of MVSU's Delta Research & Cultural Institute, who chairs the Glendora Cultural Heritage Advisory Council.

The focus of Haire and members of MVSU's Community Service-Learning students during the late-July work trip was the construction of the Emmett Till Memorial Park, featuring an interpretive nature trail.

"The original focus of this effort was to create the first safe place where children in Glendora could play and have fun," noted Haire, who said the initial park includes about 12 acres but can be enlarged by use of surrounding land to make a 30-acre park that, when completed, will feature a half-mile asphalt surface walking trail, outdoor performing arts stage, baseball field, picnic areas, a rustic campground, an RV campsite, a welcome center and, potentially, a football field and tennis and basketball courts."

"The question now is underwriters, supporters, grant-writing and revenue-generating activities," said Glendora Mayor Johnny B. Thomas, who noted that Prairie View donated the bulk of the work materials used to complete stage one of what will be a three-stage park project.

"The grant from Prairie View, of labor, materials and equipment, is probably the largest grant of this kind in this community," Thomas noted.

The mayor said the local Emmett Till Memorial Park Commission also has been working closely with Glendora officials to get the park project off the ground.

"I have to especially credit Sandra Johnson and Mayme Crowder for their efforts," he added.

While the park was a major focus of the late-July project, work also centered around the Glendora gin, an old cotton gin which now serves as home to the Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center, as well as the Sonny Boy Williamson Bed and Breakfast.

Volunteers engaged in landscaping and painting outside the gin, while the centerpiece of improvements inside — evident from the moment one enters the building — is the 33-foot-long "The Emmett Till Story," highlighting events from the time of Till's birth in 1941 until the death of Till's mother in 2003.

Rather than a true timeline, Dr. Barry Norwood, associate professor in the Prairie View School of Architecture, said the collaborative effort between students and staffers there would be more appropriately termed an "architectural representation" of Till and of the Till era.

The display, which features both text and graphics, including photos, was researched, designed and manufactured at Prairie View, then hauled to Glendora, noted Norwood. The work, comprised of individual panels that are 30 inches tall and 39 inches wide, feature as backdrops, imagery from the local Black Bayou and the Tallahatchie River.

"It took two good weeks to research, and with computer work it took almost four weeks to put together," said Norwood.

Research was a valuable component in the Till history lesson, but nothing could immerse students in the experience more than the trip to Tallahatchie County, explained Dr. Everette B. Penn, coordinator of Service Learning at Prairie View.

"What happened in Glendora, although sad, was a catalyst for action," said Penn, referring to the brutal 1955 murder of Till — a case credited with mobilizing the civil rights movement.

Penn said Prairie View students, engaging in the university's Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) residential summer program for incoming freshmen, participated in about six weeks of classroom instruction about the civil rights movement before boarding buses for Glendora.

Penn arranged the trip after his own personal research into the Till case — he also is a criminologist and the associate professor of criminology at the University of Houston Clear Lake in Houston, Texas — led him to MVSU, where he learned about that university's history and tourism partnership with Glendora.

"In the past, we have helped to rebuild New Orleans, built homes in Brownsville, Texas, traveled to Washington, D.C., and done the civil rights South," said Penn, in explaining the work of ACCESS.

"We are pleased to focus on this service-learning project in Glendora, where we can have our students not just read about history or hear about history, they are a part of history."

He noted that the faculty members and the 17- to 19-year-old students who made the trip — many of whom he said have been taught little about their ancestors' struggle for civil rights or the Till case — will never forget the personal encounter.

Penn said the group arrived in Glendora Sunday, July 27, then participated in a "Delta civil rights and human wrongs tour" led by Thomas.

After the Monday, July 28, work day, a banquet was held that night in the MVSU cafeteria dining hall.

On Tuesday, July 29, educational, leadership and health and wellness workshops were held in Glendora, followed by a community barbecue.

During their visit, Penn said the Prairie View contingent was housed at two Greenwood hotels.

"Everybody we've met has been gracious and hospitable," he noted. "It's been a good experience."

Source: The Sun-Sentinel newspaper, Aug. 14, 2008 issue, Vol. 85, Number 33

Written by: Clay McFerrin

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PVAMU ACCESS Program Prepares Students For Presidential Election Through Service-Learning

Monday, August 18, 2008



PRAIRIE VIEW, Texas--In recognition of the 2008 U.S. presidential election, more than 130 participants in Prairie View A&M University's Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) pre-college summer program traveled across several states to engage in capstone service-learning projects and historical tours aimed at providing ACCESS students with valuable lessons on the American Civil Rights Movement and the political framework of the U.S.

During the eight-day trip, students had the opportunity to tour historic national landmarks such as the William J. Clinton Presidential Library, Little Rock Central High School and the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN, where slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. The highlight of the trip and tour included a revitalization community service project in conjunction with students from Mississippi State University to restore The Emmett (Louis) Till Historic Intrepid Center in Glendora, Miss. Using principles of service-learning, a teaching method used by integrating classroom curriculum with actual hands-on community service and learning, ACCESS students built park benches, repaired building fixtures, provided landscaping services and painted building surfaces for the dilapidated center--all while learning.

On Aug. 2, this year's ACCESS class graduated from the summer program during a formal ceremony in the Willie Albert Tempton, Sr. Memorial Student Center, which included parental participation and a post reception.

** Featured above: ACCESS students creating wall mural in The Emmett (Louis) Till Historic Intrepid Center. 2008

Photo: PVAMU Public Relations

About the ACCESS Program at Prairie View A&M University:

ACCESS is a "bridge to college" program designed to improve a students' academic performance and assist in their transition from high school to college. ACCESS has two components. The first is a summer program with a seven-week residential, academic enhancement experience designed for the seriously motivated student. The ACCESS summer program provides daily skills based instruction in nontraditional classes including mathematics, reading comprehension, writing, critical thinking and problem solving. In the fall, ACCESS students who attend PVAMU enter into the second component, University College (UC). UC is a program designed to improve the first-year academic performance of all PVAMU freshman. UC is a structured, nurturing, academically focused environment that seeks to make the freshmen year a successful one by providing intrusive, holistic, professional advisement, academic enhancement, centralized support services and a residential learning community. For more information, please call (936) 261-5900.

About Prairie View A&M University:

Ranked the only Texas school on Black Enterprise magazine's 2006 list of "Top 50 Colleges and Universities for African-Americans," Prairie View A&M University was founded in 1876 and is the second-oldest public institution of higher education in Texas. With an established reputation for producing engineers, nurses and educators, PVAMU offers baccalaureate degrees in 50 academic majors, 41 master's degrees and four doctoral programs through nine colleges and schools. A member of The Texas A&M University System, the university is dedicated to fulfilling its land-grant mission of achieving excellence in teaching, research and service. During the university's 132-year history, more than 51,500 academic degrees have been awarded. For more information regarding PVAMU, visit www.pvamu.edu.

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ACCESS Summer Students Partner with City of Houston To Save Energy

Wednesday, August 26, 2009



PRAIRIE VIEW, Texas--Summer for many college bound students is usually spent vacationing or relaxing, but this summer students in Prairie View A&M University's Academy for Collegiate Excellence and Student Success (ACCESS) summer program can be seen spending summer days engaging in college preparatory training, meeting with government leaders and community service intended to spark energy conservation.

To learn about local government's role in society, ACCESS students recently toured the City of Houston's City Hall facilities and met with Houston Mayor Bill White. While learning how the City of Houston functions, students heard from city leaders, viewed council chambers and official city several offices.

To aid a partnership between CenterPoint Energy, Energy Star and the City of Houston, PVAMU ACCESS students also distributed compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) to a select number of Houston communities to encourage energy conservation. The program was co-facilitated through Houston's Weatherization Program which divided ACCESS students into groups and armed them with CFL information and bulbs. Students encouraged citizens to use CFL bulbs instead of incandescent bulbs.

Experts report that CFLs can replace incandescent bulbs that are roughly 3-4 times their wattage, saving up to 75 percent of the initial lighting energy. Although CFLs cost 3-10 times more than comparable incandescent bulbs, they last 6-15 times as long (6,000-15,000 hours).

Throughout the sunny afternoon ACCESS students distributed more than 150 bulbs energy efficient CFL bulbs to the community. ACCESS Program Executive Director Lettie Raab emphasizes to parents and students that the initiative was a great way for student to engage in service-learning, which is a learning pedagogy that incorporates community service with strategic learning principals that compliment academic study.

Other initiatives on the horizon this summer for ACCESS students will be trips to the Fort Hood military base in Texas, San Antonio and Austin.

* Featured in spotlight photo: PVAMU summer ACCESS students help share literature on CFL bulbs to Houston, especially Houston HOPE program homes. **Photo:** Keenan Lazenby



Houston Mayor Bill White welcomes PVAMU ACCESS students to Houston's City Hall Building.

Photo: Bryce Hairston Kennard



ACCESS students tour Houston City Council Chamber room.

Photo: Bryce Hairston Kennard

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Prairie View A&M University was founded in 1876 and is the second-oldest public institution of higher education in Texas. With an established reputation for producing engineers, corporate leaders, nurses and educators, PVAMU offers baccalaureate degrees in 41 academic majors, 46 master's degrees and four doctoral degree programs through eight colleges and schools. The university recently named its College of Engineering for PVAMU alumnus Roy G. Perry and the University's marching band, The Marching Storm, was featured as the lead band in the 2009 Rose Parade. A member of The Texas A&M University System, the university is dedicated to fulfilling its land-grant mission of achieving excellence in teaching, research and service. During the university's 132-year history, more than 50,000 academic degrees have been awarded. For more information regarding PVAMU, visit www.pvamu.edu.

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