

All the Way Up, all night long

MLK Day brings West End youth together for fellowship and fun

By Cole Villena

Two weeks after New Year's, hundreds of West End residents came together once again to celebrate a cherished American holiday. Posters of Martin Luther King Jr. replaced brightly-colored 2018 banners. Coffee, not champagne, was the drink of choice for adults at the Community Family Life and Recreation Center at Lyon Park.

Another key difference: this celebration lasted all night long.

For 26 years, the First Calvary Baptist Church MLK Day Lock-In has provided West End students a place for fun, learning and community-building during their long weekend. The result of collaboration from groups like Durham Parks and Recreation, the Durham-Duke Neighborhood Partnership and the West End Community Foundation, the event has become a community tradition since it was first held in 1992.

Fredrick Davis, who has served as First Calvary's pastor since 1991, says the event was conceived as a way to fill an often-overlooked gap in the education of his church's students.

"When Martin Luther King Day became a national holiday, schoolchildren were out," Davis said. "There was nothing creative for them to do or anything centered around the life of Dr. King."

Davis knew this had to change.

He hosted the first lock-in, which was attended by a dozen students in the church's basement. Students spent the night playing games, sharing snacks and engaging in group discussions about teen and community issues before joining the MLK Day march in downtown Durham the next morning. The 156 students at this year's lock-in participated in similar activities. The march has become a highlight for students and volunteers.

A large part of the event's success, Davis



The teens participate in anti-bullying skits. The anti-bullying workshop is one of many that the teens participate in throughout the night (Cole Villena).

says, has been its ability to stay relevant by providing for students in new ways each year. Small group discussions have evolved into full-fledged workshops that focus on topics such as career-readiness, dating and healthy social media use. Each lock-in also has a central theme; Davis smiles when asked about this year's.

"I'm All the Way Up," he says, quoting both the Grammy-winning rap collaboration between Fat Joe and Remy Ma and the t-shirts worn by this year's lock-in participants. "I'm not going to let nothing crush me or push me down. I'm standing All the Way

Up.' The climate of the country calls for that (message)."

Amber Burgin, a Duke Divinity School student who facilitated "town halls" between students and Durham School Board member Xavier Cason, believes that an emphasis on empowerment and unity is more important now than ever before.

"Given the climate that we live in politically, emotionally and socially, it's important for the students, particularly in Durham County, to get an opportunity to be together utilizing the goals that Dr. King had about bringing people togeth-

er," she said. "The earlier we get people engrossed in community and teach them about how community can lead to peace... that's an opportunity for them to learn how to make that a permanent thing."

26-year-old Shed Poole attended the MLK Day Lock-In every year as a teenager and returned as a chaperone for the first time this year. As he watched his group of 12- and 13-year-olds prepare for the annual dodgeball tournament, he answered immediately when asked what made the event so special to him.

"It was a lot of positive role models," he said. "A lot of these kids are misguided. A lot of them don't have the love and support at home, and it's important to show that somebody cares for them. You don't have to be a basketball player. You don't have to be a rapper. You can be a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer... anything you want to do."

Poole, who owns a cleaning business in the Durham area, was already a superstar among his students by the time the dodgeball tournament began. The highly-decorated dodgeball veteran did something he'd never done during a tournament: he sat on the sidelines and took a break, hoping to save some energy for the long hours ahead of him.

It was only midnight after all. His night had barely begun.

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