

Positivity with every mile

By Julia Masters

From under his blue baseball cap, Royelle Hubbert sings along, “Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper.” He glances into the rearview mirror every so often to make sure his passengers are still covering the backup vocals.

“I try to help set the tone for the day by the music I play in the van,” said Hubbert. “If they are taking in this message, then they can’t take in any others.”

Hubbert strives to create an atmosphere of love, promise, hope, understanding and compassion with a dash of firmness between the shiny black sliding doors of his spotless van.

He has been up since the crack of dawn, picking up and dropping off some of the 900 displaced residents of McDougald Terrace who have been staying in around 26 different hotels across Durham for over a month.

Hubbert, owner of Tinted Masters Auto Center Transportation, and six of his drivers originally began providing their services for free when the crisis hit. When the jobs started piling up, they partnered with the Durham Housing Authority to do it long term.

Getting residents from point A to point B is not Hubbert’s only agenda, however. With each mile, Hubbert attempts to inspire positive mindsets and ease any tensions between the residents and the DHA.

“Some of these people that work for housing, most of them did not create this

problem,” Hubbert said. “They just took a job in a place that was going to allow them to help people. The problems were already pre-existing before they got there.”

However, Hubbert also believes that everyone has a part in the problem and needs to take responsibility for their actions.

“I can take an apartment, fix it, make it in mint condition, but if I don’t keep the upkeep on it, then we are going to be right back in the same situation,” Hubbert said. “The liability has to go on both ends.”

He compared the situation to littering. “If you keep throwing paper out of your window, it will accumulate and eventually people on the outside will not be able to clean it all,” Hubbert said. “McDougald Terrace is a result of this two-sided littering.”

To stop the cycle, Hubbert suggests that DHA officials need to monitor the units and their conditions more frequently. Hubbert shared his belief that being tired is understandable, but stress is a choice.

His decision to turn his life around came after realizing what his ancestors and his people endured for him: discrimination, lynchings, beatings and burns.

“They had no choice but to get up and perform and perform with a smile under those conditions, so I know that I have another gear,” said Hubbert. “I have the bloodline of champions and the heart of a king so I am going to make sure I keep moving because they had no choice.”

The People Speak

Ernestine Bey, the first person picked up in the morning, commented on how grateful she is for Hubbert’s selfless services.

“The transportation has been really amazing; I just wish we didn’t have to get it through these circumstances,” said Bey. “He’s made sure my daughter is not late to school and has gotten me and my boyfriend wherever we need to be.”

After a hearty wave through the window, Carolyn Barrett climbs into the van to be escorted to the emergency room. She’s lived at McDougald Terrace for the past 11 years and praises the DHA for their work.

“They made a great effort. They are doing all they can to help us,” Barrett said bluntly. “Some people are just so ungrateful.”

“The transportation has been really amazing, I just wish we didn’t have to get it through these circumstances.”

—Ernestine Bey



Close up: Royelle Hubbert, owner of TMAC Transportation, sings “Way Maker” by Sinach with his passengers as he drives the displaced residents of McDougald Terrace to various appointments, school and work. (Photo by Julia Masters)

The morning shift ended with Hubbert taking two of his 12 children to school, making time to hold their hand and hug them outside the classroom door.

Hubbert hopes to see several positive changes come out of the crisis.

“I really want McDougald Terrace to see how strong they can be and how self-sufficient they can be as a community,” Hubbert said. “You can govern yourself. Stop sitting around and waiting for someone to do what you can do for yourself.”

Hubbert went on to provide transportation till 12:30 a.m., plan the next day’s route till 2 a.m. and wake up before the sun to do it over again, all with a smile.