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Champaign's celebration nears close with mural, time capsule, photo

Thu, 06/16/2011 - 10:00am | Patrick Wade

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CHAMPAIGN — The city's sesquicentennial celebration is drawing to a close, but maybe when the bicentennial rolls around, residents 50 years from now will have something to look back on.

That is what city officials are hoping a mural, a time capsule and a "community snapshot" will accomplish when they are dedicated at the last "Champaign 150" event next week.

Muralist Glen C. Davies was working toward finishing the mural on Wednesday in the Champaign City Building. He has been painting for a little more than a week now.

His incomplete mural — so far — includes what he says are representations of where the city came from and where it could be going.

Notable landmarks like the Assembly Hall and the City Building — where the city has come from — are prominent. More recent developments like One Main and M2 — where the city could be going — are also represented.

"I was asked to create a mural that kind of told the story of the history of Champaign," Davies said.

He has been working off old photos of trolley cars and railroads and part of his mural is a sepia-toned record of historic buildings.

In representing people, he said he wanted to focus on the diversity of the community.

After it is dedicated on Thursday's closeout event, the mural will have a permanent home in the atrium of the City Building where it was created.

"I hope it sends the message of change in the past to the present," Davies said.

Thursday's event is the last in more than a year's worth of activities that officials have been using to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the city's creation. It started in March 2010 with a historical exhibit, which celebrated the past, and later a summer 2010 music festival, which celebrated the present.

Next week's closing ceremony will look toward the future.

"Our whole concept (with the mural) was to be able to represent some kind of lasting impression," said LaEisha Meaderds, the project manager for the sesquicentennial celebration.

It is meant to be somewhat of a snapshot of the city.

"We hope for it to be a representation of our community and what it stands for," Meaderds said.

In addition to entertainment, games, music and food, next week's closeout event will include the burying of a time capsule, to be opened during the city's bicentennial celebration.

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News by Date

June 2011						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

The event will also include a "community photo that we'll take, which we are really excited about because we don't have anything of that sort," Meaderds said. She is hoping a good number of residents will be willing to show up for the photo.

One of the original plans for the sesquicentennial celebration — the construction of a fountain in One Main plaza — has been put on hold. City officials decided the timing was not right as the budget grew tight, but Meaderds said the plan could come back in the future.

"There was a set of funds that were reserved for the fountain specifically, and those are being held for future development," Meaderds said.

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What: Champaign sesquicentennial Unity Celebration

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When: June 23, 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

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Effort under way to digitize yearbooks

Mon, 06/27/2011 - 8:00am | Jodi Heckel

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8

If you're looking for photos for a high school reunion, or researching the school days of family members, a new online resource could help.

The eBlack Champaign-Urbana project is digitizing yearbooks from Champaign and Urbana high schools and putting them on its website, at <http://www.eblackcu.net>.

"We wanted to do something that would touch as many people as possible in Champaign-Urbana," said Noah Lenstra, director of the eBlackCU project. "We're just trying to find ways to use new technology to have an impact on the community."



Photo by: John Dixon/The News-Gazette
Illuminated by the bulb of a digital scanner, Adrian Rochelle, an intern with the eBlackCU project, scans a page from the 1958 Urbana High School Rosemary yearbook .

The goal of eBlackCU is to provide information on local African-American history and culture, invite residents to share their memories or materials about the local black community through digital technology, and make local African-American history more visible and accessible.

Lenstra said the effort to digitize local yearbooks is an extension of a project eBlackCU undertook last summer, in which it digitized the commemorative yearbooks from an annual Cotillion Ball for young African-American women. The eBlackCU website now has digitized versions of the commemorative yearbooks dating to 1972, the year the Cotillion Ball was first held.

This summer, interns are working on digitizing yearbooks from Champaign and Urbana high schools from the 1960s, '70s and '80s. They are working with the Champaign and Urbana public libraries, the libraries at Urbana and Central high schools, and the Champaign County Historical Archives to get copies of the yearbooks.

The interns are scanning high-resolution images of the yearbooks. Then Lenstra is converting them to lower-resolution images that will load faster online. The high-resolution masters will be made available to the Champaign County Historical Archives so they can add the digital images to their database if they want, Lenstra said.

So far, the eBlack website has digitized copies of the Champaign High School yearbook from 1960 to 1965. Five yearbooks from Urbana High School are scanned but not yet online. Lenstra is hoping to digitize at least two decades of yearbooks from each high school this summer.

Some of the yearbooks they've been working with have had photos cut out of them. With the digital versions of the yearbooks, anyone could get an image he or she wanted without damaging the book, Lenstra said. The text of the digital yearbooks will be searchable as well, so someone could search for the name of a person for whom they wanted a photo or information.

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« June 2011 »







Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Lenstra said the process the interns are using to digitize the yearbooks is simple and replicable. He wants anyone to be able to continue the work. Along with digitizing the yearbooks, the eBlackCU project is developing training materials on the process.

In addition, the interns working on the yearbook project will also be helping with computer classes this summer. When information about the yearbook was presented at Salem Baptist Church, several people asked for help with digitizing photos, Lenstra said.

"I think it's really good for people to have access to these things," said Adrian Rochelle, a Central High School junior and one of the interns who is working on the yearbook project. "It shows how this technology has advanced."

One of the goals for the summer, Lenstra said, is for the interns "to not only learn about new technology, but to be able to teach new technology as well. We'd like to see everyone be able to use technology to its fullest."

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It's Your Business: Blues BBQ reopening

Sun, 06/19/2011 - 11:00am | Christine Des Garennes

 Like 6

After facing several challenges following its relocation to Champaign, the restaurant Blues BBQ reopens for lunch on Monday.

Blues BBQ, 1410 N. Prospect Ave., had been closed temporarily for dine-in, but remained open for catering.

The restaurant moved to North Prospect Avenue, formerly home to Prospect BBQ & Sweets and prior to that a Chinese restaurant, last fall. It originally opened at 701 S. Gregory Ave., U, in 2005, but closed in December 2009, planning to move across town.

The restaurant will be open for lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekdays. Management expects to be open for dinner as well as weekends in about a month, said Rebecca Shuford, vice president of operations. They're also serving up food at the Taste of Champaign this weekend and at the city of Champaign's sesquicentennial Unity Celebration at the Boneyard Creek basin on June 23.

Due to the delay in opening the dining room last fall, and some building issues that arose, such as a malfunctioning heating and air conditioning system and the need to overhaul the fire suppression system and address parking space issues, "we lost some momentum," said owner Darryl Cheeks.

The restaurant closed temporarily to deal with those issues.

"We wanted to make sure when we open up again we won't have these issues. ... We are now ready to rock and roll," Cheeks said.

Catering also is available. The restaurant can be reached at 352-9007 and <http://www.eatbluesbbq.com>.

Clothing store coming

National urban clothing chain Citi Trends plans to open a store in Champaign this fall.

Citi Trends sells brands like Rocawear, Apple Bottoms, Akademiks, Baby Phat and more. The Savannah, Ga.-based company has about 482 stores in 27 states, including several in Illinois cities such as Decatur, Springfield, Peoria and some Chicago suburbs, according to Susan Weiner, vice president of marketing. Citi Trends is opening about 70 new stores this year.

The opening for the at 2013 N. Prospect Ave., in Baytowne Square, is anticipated for the beginning of October, Weiner said.

Ready for your closeup?

Photographer Lou Taylor plans to launch her own photography business in Champaign on July 1. The Lou Taylor Photography studio will be located above the pet store Sailfin, 720 S. Neil S.

Taylor, a former manager of the Olan Mills studio in Meijer, offers portrait, wedding, children and pet

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News by Date

« June 2011 »

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

photography as well as photos of homes and products for people selling items online. She also does photo restoration.

She provides clients with a CD of the photos with copyright release. And she said any military service member who has orders to deploy within two weeks of making an appointment can come to the studio and receive a picture in uniform for free.

"That way families have updated pictures of them," she said.

The assistant photographer will be Brandy Nickell, also a former studio manager at Olan Mills.

Taylor is booking appointments for July. She can be reached at 352-9095 or via email at lou@loutaylorphotography.com. The website is <http://www.loutaylorphotography.com>.

Now open

— Panchero's is now open at the Gateway Shoppes at Five Points at 102 E. University Ave., U. The Mexican food chain is known for burritos, quesadillas and other items made with hand-pressed tortillas. It can be reached at 367-4000.

— The McDonald's in Tuscola is now open following a three-month tear-down and rebuild on the site of the old restaurant.

The restaurant, 1005 E. Southline Road, opened Wednesday.

The McDonald's had been there since about 1985 and franchise owners Jim and Pat Desmond, who have had the restaurant for about 20 years, said "it was time" for a new building and look.

The phone number, 253-5266, remains the same.

Are you opening a new business or changing an existing business? Christine des Garennes can be reached by phone at 351-5388 or 800-252-3346; by email at cgarenne@news-gazette.com; or by regular mail at The News-Gazette, c/o It's Your Business column, P.O. Box 677, Champaign, IL 61824-0677.

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Life Remembered: Ben Cox, one of Freedom Riders

Thu, 06/16/2011 - 8:00am | Paul Wood

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Five decades before he died Sunday at 79, the Rev. Ben Elton Cox Sr. risked his life as one of 13 original Freedom Riders, insisting on desegregating interstate travel in the Deep South during the early 1960s.

On May 13, 1961, in Anniston, Ala., white men with clubs and bricks attacked the Freedom Riders' two buses, slashing tires. One of the buses was fire-bombed and a mob trapped the riders inside.

Local police escorted the bus out of town, but flat tires caused another stop, and the mob took advantage, with several riders taken to the hospital.

The Rev. Cox was a humble man and didn't talk about it much with his own family, eldest son Ben Cox Jr. said.

Though it was national news in 1961, a source of concern for President John F. Kennedy, and changed federal law, his son learned more about his father's heroism in church talks than at the kitchen table.

"I think he wanted to protect us from some of the darker aspects of the trip," his son said Tuesday.

"He was very humble about it, but we studied his case in law school," said a longtime friend in the Ministerial Alliance, the Rev. Evelyn Underwood.

Another prominent pastor, the Rev. Claude Shelby, was his friend for 30 years.

"He was always very interested in civil rights. However, he did love the Gospel as well," Shelby said.

Shelby often invited the Rev. Cox to speak at Salem Baptist Church during Black History Month.

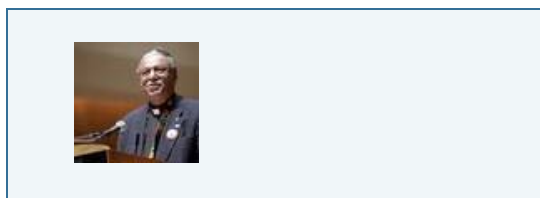
"He always had something important to say about the Freedom Rides and the 1960s," Shelby said.

A native of the South, the future Rev. Cox spent his teen years in Kankakee.

In 1960, after academic work at Livingstone College and Howard University, he decided to make civil rights his vocation.



Photo by: AP Photo/Byron Rollins
Members of a group pose in Washington, with a map of a route they plan to take to test segregation in bus terminal restaurants and rest rooms in the South, May 4, 1961. From left are: Edward Blankenheim, Tucson, Ariz.; James Farmer, New York City; Genevieve Hughes, Chevy Chase, Md.; the Rev. B. Elton Cox, High Point, N.C., and Henry Thomas, St. Augustine, Fla. They are all members of the Congress of Racial Equality, the organization sponsoring the trip.



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News by Date

June 2011						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

The Rev. Cox began working as a field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, then moved to the Congress of Racial Equality.

CORE co-founder James Farmer sent out a call in 1961 for civil rights activists, black and white alike, to challenge color barriers throughout the South on a Freedom Bus trip from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans.

"Someone has to do it," Cox told The News-Gazette in 2003. "Someone had to pay a price to get us to the state we were in — Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, the whites who helped us on the Underground Railroad. Someone has to keep it going."

The Rev. Cox was jailed 17 times during the civil rights movement. He had an FBI file to challenge the thickness of Dr. Martin Luther King's.

By the fall of 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission banned segregation in interstate travel and "whites only" signs at bus terminals.

In the late 1960s, he returned to the Midwest, where he worked as a Baptist pastor, a chaplain at the Danville Veterans Affairs Hospital, a program director at Parkland College and a social studies and African American history teacher in several local schools.

"A lot of people from Franklin (middle school) always ask me if he was my dad. They said he was stern, but everybody still liked him," Ben Cox Jr. said.

Longtime friend and choir director Willie Summerville said the Rev. Cox embraced all of humanity.

"He was really big, not only about civil rights, but talking about unity," Summerville recalled.

The Rev. Cox once spoke to a Rotary prayer breakfast and asked how many people in the audience agreed that civilization began in the lands mentioned in the Bible.

Summerville said they all said yes.

"Aren't Egypt and Africa there?" the Rev. Cox asked. "I'm going to greet you all: Hello, my fellow African-Americans."

Summerville said the Rev. Cox's sense of humor always smoothed situations.

Underwood noted that, besides his civil rights and Ministerial Alliance work, the pastor was very active in the American Cancer Society and Lions Club.

He never truly retired from the equality movement, however.

He said nonviolent action is the best way to effect change.

"To fight back, you're asking your opposition to kill you, really. By not fighting back, you're saying, 'I'll take everything you can dish out,'" he told The News-Gazette. "Confronting your opposition in a nonviolent way can win them over."

He called for equality worldwide.

"We must have massive nonviolent protest. That embarrasses America around the world," the Rev. Cox said. "The majority of white people in this country are for equality, but they are silent. They are not going to get involved until we get involved. As long as we remain nonviolent, we will have more support than you can think of."

In 1995, the Rev. Cox wanted to march in the Million Man March, but thought he couldn't afford the trip.

WDWS-AM donors spontaneously contributed more than \$700 for Cox to buy an airplane ticket for him to go back to Washington.

In 1998, the Rev. Cox moved back to Tennessee.

Local friends and admirers want to have a service here, but right now the only service planned is in Jackson, Tenn.

He is survived by wife, Edna, and has four sons, Ben Jr., Darnell, Bernard and Darryl, according to an

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obituary in the Jackson Sun.

The funeral will be held at 2 p.m. Saturday in New St. Luke Church in Jackson, with a visitation from noon until the funeral.

There also will be a visitation from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and a friends and family hour from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday.

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Retired police raise money for gravestone for first black officer in Champaign

Fri, 06/24/2011 - 8:00am | Tim Mitchell

Like 35 2

CHAMPAIGN — Some retired Champaign police officers were surprised to learn that the city's first black police officer is buried in an unmarked grave at Mount Hope Cemetery.

So they're raising money to buy a gravestone.

Retired Champaign patrolman Stan Earle was recently chatting with retired Champaign police Officer Dave Godwin about looking up gravesites on the Internet.

"I do a lot of genealogy work and go to cemeteries and photograph headstones for people," Godwin said.

"Dave suggested we begin researching the graves of Champaign police officers," Earle said.

When the men searched for the grave of Sgt. Allen A. Rivers Sr. and visited it at Mount Hope Cemetery, they were surprised to learn that there was no marker.

Sgt. Rivers became Champaign's first black police officer on Aug. 4, 1935. He retired on Aug. 1, 1960, and died in 1989.

"He was one heck of a nice man," Godwin said.

"Any person you talk to will tell you that Sgt. Rivers was a class act," Earle said.

Earle said the two men and three other retired Champaign police officers — C.W. Kinney, Don Rinehart and Zane Ziegler — decided to form a committee to raise money to buy a gravestone for Sgt. Rivers.

"We have contacted the family, and they are appreciative of this effort," Earle said.

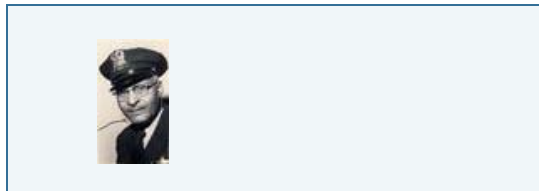
Earle said donations may be sent to the Allen A. Rivers Sr. Memorial Fund at First Federal Savings Bank, 1311 S. Neil St., C.

Earle said the committee hopes to raise \$1,500 for the gravestone and installation.

"We're hoping to get one big enough to put the names of his children on it and an engraved photograph of him in his Champaign police uniform," Godwin said.



Photo by: Darrell Hoemann/The News-Gazette
 The unmarked gravesite of Champaign's first African-American police officer, Sgt. Al Rivers Sr., in Mount Hope Cemetery in Champaign.



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« June 2011 »

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Urbana Garden Family

Any money raised over the cost of the gravestone will be used to purchase a memorial for Sgt. Rivers' second wife, Ellyn B. Rivers, who also does not have a grave marker, and to make other improvements at the grave site.

"Sgt. Rivers was a wonderful man who left a positive imprint on the community, and this is a way to honor him," Earle said.

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Mary Ann Baker wrote on June 24, 2011 at 11:06 am #1

I was so sorry to read that Sgt. Allan Rivers was resting in an unmarked grave. I was raised on North Third Street in Champaign many, many years ago and Sgt. Rivers was the walking 'cop' on our beat. He always had time for a little conversation and was a true gentleman. My check will be in the mail before the day is over. Thank you for doing this for him. Mary Ann (Stahl) Baker

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peabody wrote on June 24, 2011 at 1:06 pm #2

A tribute of the highest order. Thanks to the N-G for the story and many thanks to the retired CPD officers for this. I hope the CPD itself also makes a contribution.

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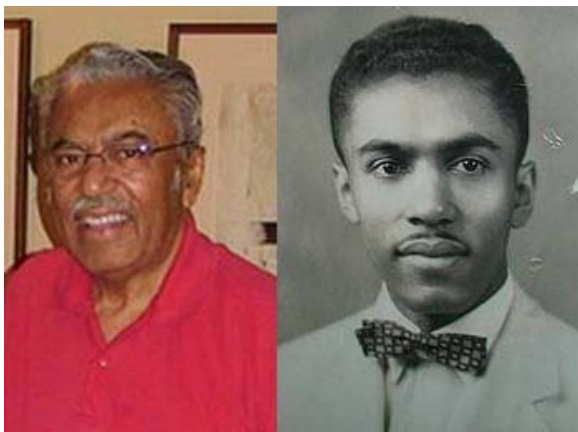
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Rev. Ben Cox, Former C-U Resident and Freedom Rider, Dies at Age 79

Story date: Thursday, June 16, 2011 from The Associated Press



A pastor who was one of the original Freedom Riders and spent much of his life in Champaign-Urbana has died.

The Rev. Ben Elton Cox Sr. died Sunday in Jackson, Tenn. The 79-year-old Baptist minister had lived in Tennessee since 1998.

The News-Gazette reports that Cox was among the Freedom Riders who went to the South in the early 1960s to protest segregation. He was on a bus that was attacked in Anniston, Ala., in 1961 by white men with clubs and bricks.

Speaking on a panel with fellow Freedom Riders Ed Blankenheim and Hank Thomas in 2003 at the University of Illinois in Urbana, Cox said he got off easier than his fellow panelists. But he said that as an African-American, discrimination had been a constant part of his life, ever since he first learned about it at age four.

"You're looking at a man who's an ordained minister, preaching since I was 17", Cox told his audience. "I'm 72. And since I realized what segregation was at the age of four, I have never had one day of total freedom in the land of the free and the home of the brave. I've either been discriminated against, or heard about it or listened to other confessions about it. But yet, I love America. As far as I'm concerned, it's the greatest country on earth. If you find one better, call me collect."

Ben Cox Jr. says his father spoke little about his role in the Freedom Rides and the civil rights movement. The younger Cox believes his father wanted to shield him from the darker things he'd experienced.

Cox spent his teen years in Kankakee and lived much of his adult life in Champaign-Urbana.

(Photos courtesy of codepinkhq/flickr)

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- [Rev. Ben Elton Cox Speaks at U of I in 2003](#)

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June 2011						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25

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Rose and Taylor holds celebration

Fri, 06/17/2011 - 5:03pm | Paul Wood

Like 15 2

CHAMPAIGN — A little to the east of the big food festival, there's free barbecue, music and card games Saturday.

The Rose and Taylor Barber and Beauty Shop Father's Day/Community Appreciation Celebration offers free barbecue, music, raffles spades, bid whist and dominoes at 124 N. First St., C.

Organizer William Jones, who owns Rose and Taylor, said it is the second annual event, but last year's was "not to the magnitude of what we're doing this year."

The event runs from noon until the last person leaves, Jones said.

Music will be provided by DJ Stevenson.

Meanwhile, the Taste of Champaign-Urbana continues a few blocks away in West Side Park.

Jones said eight different vendors will compete in the barbecue championships.

"These are people who've been making barbecue a long time, and have won many competitions," he said. "We have judges from the University of Illinois and restaurants to judge the cooks, many of whom are household names."

The names of the vendors will be announced Saturday. Jones said they will be there early making sauces and setting up their cookers.

"Everything will be done on site, so the judges can inspect everything that's being done," he said.

Games for children include Xbox and PlayStation, "and then we have games for gentlemen such as card games and dominoes," Jones said. "We will be also be giving out prizes."

To achieve a block-party effect, Jones said, "we have blocked off the entire block of Park (Street) at First to celebrate Father's Day," Jones said.

He said the celebration is not in competition with the Taste.

"What they're doing is concerning different restaurants. We're celebrating fathers here," he said.

The barber shop is one of the oldest in the area, celebrating 50 years, Jones said.

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News by Date

« June 2011 »

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

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Scout collects backpacks, supplies for migrant children

Sun, 06/19/2011 - 10:00am | Jodi Heckel

Like 22 2

URBANA — When migrant children begin attending summer school in Urbana next month, they'll receive backpacks filled with school supplies, thanks to an Urbana Boy Scout.

Rodney LeNoir, a member of Boy Scout Troop 402 and a University Laboratory High School student, is collecting the backpacks and supplies for his Eagle Scout project.

He started looking for a project idea last year.

"A lot of them were good ideas, but there wasn't anything I really wanted to do that would help people," he said. "I really wanted to do something that would really have an impact on people."

Then LeNoir, 15, thought about the scout camp for migrant children where he's volunteered. He sought help from the Urbana school district and ended up talking with Joe Wiemelt, the district's director of bilingual and multicultural programs, who is co-director of the migrant summer school program.

"(LeNoir) really wanted to do something that was valuable to the community," Wiemelt said. "We absolutely thought it was a great idea, and it would be very beneficial to the students who come to us this summer."

LeNoir and Wiemelt talked about how to go about collecting the backpacks and supplies. LeNoir originally thought about seeking donations of just backpacks, but then Wiemelt and his summer school co-director, Jason Swanson, learned about a company looking to get rid of some backpacks.

The company donated nearly 300 backpacks, and the district used some stimulus money earmarked for helping homeless or migrant students to buy another 70.

"Since we had such a large and generous donation, now we need to fill them," LeNoir said.

He is hoping to fill them with school supplies, hygiene products such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, shampoo and soap, coupons, and a resource guide being created by the Urbana school district's Latino liaison. LeNoir put dropoff boxes for donations in several schools and businesses.

LeNoir hopes area businesses will donate items they use for advertising, such as pens or rulers with the business name on them. He and Wiemelt are also working with the Vineyard Church in Urbana to get donations. LeNoir said he is happy the project has expanded as it has.

Wiemelt said he isn't sure if the backpacks will be distributed to the students when they begin summer



Photo by: Vanda Bidwell/The News-Gazette
Rodney LeNoir at Burkholder Administrative Service Center in Urbana. Rodney is collecting school supplies to fill backpacks for migrant children for his Eagle Scout project.

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News by Date

« June 2011 »











Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

school on July 5, or at the end of the month-long program, so they can have them for the start of the regular school year in the fall. It depends on how quickly they can collect enough supplies.

"It's just a wonderful way to make a meaningful impact in students' lives," Wiemelt said of LeNoir's project. "It's social justice at the ground level."

HOW TO HELP

Anyone interested in making a donation of school supplies or toiletries to Rodney LeNoir's Eagle Scout project can contact LeNoir at le Noir2012@gmail.com, or drop off donations at Canaan Academy, 207 N. Central St., U.

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Categories (3): [News](#), [People](#), [Social Services](#)

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