

DISTINGUISHED DOER PROFILE

Tomorrow's cultural leaders learn today

By SHIRLEY A. BROWN
St. Louis Argus Society Writer

Cultural Leadership is a nonprofit educational, leadership program for African American and Jewish youth. The program's goal is to produce a future generation of young people who will know what it means to have a relationship based on respect and cooperation and will work to fight racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination. Students learn to dispel stereotypes and promote dialogue, cooperation, understanding and mutual respect between all people.

Cultural Leadership students participate in a year-long program that includes the following: educational classes and cultural activities to teach them about their own and each others' race, religion, culture, and history as well as about institutional racism, power, privilege and prejudice; study/travel to places of significance to both groups in the United States; public speaking about the program and discussions on

issues of racism, diversity, and discrimination.

Cultural Leadership is open to high school juniors of Jewish and/or African American descent in the St. Louis region who have demonstrated maturity, an interest in community and leadership potential. Approximately 28 students are chosen to participate. Parents/guardians are urged to meet regularly while their youth are in the program.

Why Cultural Leadership? Racial tensions exist, not only between African Americans and Jews but also between African Americans and Whites, in St. Louis and other communities. Examples of mistrust, disrespect, intolerance and misunderstanding abound. According to a report entitled Racial Equality in the St. Louis Region: A Call to Action, St. Louis is one of the most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the country. It is a challenging and complex problem that is firmly entrenched in our region.

Cultural Leadership was created

to replace prejudice with facts, ignorance with knowledge and suspicion with friendship among Jews and African Americans. The program is modeled after a successful program in Washington, DC and is now in St. Louis, a community that desperately needs racial healing and greater understanding. A volunteer Board of Directors is responsible for the mission, governance and activities of Cultural Leadership

Recruitment and selection of students occurs in the fall, at the beginning of their junior year of high school. The program begins the following January with a three-day overnight retreat on Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday weekend. From February to April, the students meet monthly. Another retreat is held in April devoted to the Civil Rights Movement and the St. Louis School Desegregation case. Study/Travel occurs for three weeks in June and July. In August, students learn public speaking and fundraising skills. In their senior year, students speak throughout the community

by facilitating discussions on issues of discrimination and diversity and by meeting monthly to continue learning about each other. The students graduate the following January.

Applications for Cultural Leadership are distributed to schools, synagogues and Black churches in the St. Louis area. Face-to face student interviews are held. For additional information about Cultural Leadership, call 725-3222. Karen Kalish is the Founder and Executive Director.

Nominate a Doer: To keep readers informed on who's who in the community, Argus Society Writer Shirley A. Brown will highlight a community Doer each week. A Doer is an individual or organization committed to making St. Louis a better place to live and work. Readers are invited to send nominations of their candidates for consideration. To recommend a Doer, send a brief bio and glossy photo to Shirley A. Brown at the St. Louis Argus or send via e-mail to SBrown601@aol.com.



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These St. Louis area high school students are the first to complete class number one of "Cultural Leadership".