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Class 23 of Operation Understanding Visits Shalom Park

By Amy Krakovitz

For 23 summers, Operation Understanding takes Jewish and African-American students from the Washington, DC area on a journey. “Our young leaders stand on the battlegrounds of past struggles throughout the Deep South. They study in-depth the history of the African American and Jewish experiences in our country. Civil Rights-era leaders and foot soldiers share their stories from the front lines of the Movement. Modern-day justice advocates illustrate the work still to be done and how to get involved. Our students learn from each other, spending hours exploring issues, having honest dialogue, and developing steadfast relationships that erase racial, religious and ideological boundaries,” says their website.

As part of the journey, each class stops in Charlotte, to learn about being Jewish in the south, to tour Shalom Park and appreciate its cooperative agencies, and to meet with local Civil Rights Leader, Charles Jones, who tells them about his experience as a young man in both the desegregation of Charlotte and parts of South Carolina, as well as his experience as a Freedom Rider throughout the South.

It’s an extensive journey from DC to Mississippi, including Greensboro, Memphis, parts of Alabama, and Atlanta. They study the history of the movement, learn from today’s and yesterday’s heroes, and experience the brother-



Charles Jones, far left, speaks to Class 23 of OUDC.

hood of Jews and African-Americans who worked together to bring about Equal Rights for all, and who still collaborate to continue the dream.

The students are high school students with diverse reasons for taking this journey. “I didn’t know much about civil rights, or my culture or other cultures,” says Rhema Jones, 17, a student at Kipp College Prep in DC, explaining why she chose to go on OUDC. “I felt ‘not woke.’”

Nicholas Whitman, a 17-year-old who attends Woodrow Wilson Senior High in DC, came on the program due to a recommendation from a former participant. “I saw how it transformed his views.”

The students toured the park, stopping with particular interest at

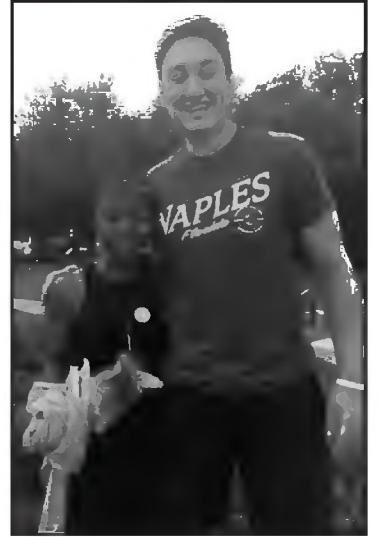
the Butterfly Sculpture. The highlight of the afternoon, though, was a visit from Charles Jones, Charlotte’s own Civil Rights Activist and former Freedom Rider. Through song and story, he told them the tale of standing up to desegregation in downtown Char-

lotte, about his time in jail, and about his accomplishments across the south.

Up until then, the students had had some remarkable experiences. At the Holocaust Museum, Rhema Jones was stunned by the exhibits. And she was changed, too, when the group did a “privilege walk,” where they took steps forward or backward according to how privileged they felt about particular things. “There were students way in front, and others far in the back. Everyone felt something, some of us ashamed and guilty.”

Whitman learned while on the campus of North Carolina A & T about the Greensboro Massacre of 1979. “There’s so much important history that you never hear about,” he says. “This trip has opened my eyes to that.”

As a musician, Rhema Jones always thought that she would just play music, but she sees now “that I can use music to help people. Music changes the way people think.” And the experience with



Rhema Jones and Nicholas Whitman.

OUDC has made her want to make changes in the world.

Whitman has seen how this trip can impact him, even before it is over: “You can build relationships with people you might never have met,” he says, “if you’d only step out of your comfort zone.” ☆

Michael and Lenora Borchardt Help Expand Spay/Neuter Efforts in Gaston County Gift Establishes Lenora Borchardt Spay Neuter Center in Gastonia

As the proud owners of four adopted dogs from the Animal League of Gaston County, Michael and Lenora Borchardt understand the importance of the organization. It made it an easy decision to donate toward the expansion and relocation of an existing spay neuter clinic to downtown Gastonia.

The Lenora Borchardt Spay Neuter Center was dedicated on June 23. The larger, more-prominent facility replaces the small but popular Gaston Low-Cost Spay/Neuter Clinic, which recently celebrated its 30,000th surgery. The gift from the Borchardts was in support of the couple’s belief in rescue and adoption for all family pets.

“We established the Michael and Lenora Borchardt Family Foundation through the Foundation for the Charlotte Jewish Community (FCJC) and Foundation For The Carolinas in 2007 to



Joan, Michael, and Lenora Borchardt.

facilitate our family’s philanthropy and have used it to support the Animal League of Gaston County and their efforts to provide low-cost spay and neuter services,” Lenora said. “We are honored to provide the lead gift to expand and permanently locate the clinic in downtown Gastonia, our home of many years. We partnered with our local community

foundation to formalize this gift that will benefit not only the residents of Gastonia but the broader region for years to come.”

The Borchardts moved to Gastonia in 1972 and lived in the community for 30 years, moving to Charlotte in 2002. Lenora added that the clinic was originally supposed to be named after Michael, also, but he graciously withdrew his name to keep the Center’s name shorter.

The Michael and Lenora Borchardt Family Foundation was established as a donor advised fund at FCJC, a subsidiary of Foundation For The Carolinas. They have worked with FCJC to support other favorite charities that include the Jewish Federations of Greater Charlotte and Atlanta, Hillel, and Temple Beth El. In addition, the Borchardts have created a legacy

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