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Feature story on the BMOA Wheels of Dreams Youth Foundation and
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Faith & Values

Good Works: Teens take vehicle to future Wheels of Dreams offers life lessons

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Staff

More than 7,000 middle and high school students are looking for a better ride to the future on the Wheels of Dreams bus.

The traveling classroom rolls from school to school in metro Atlanta during the year and stops at community centers during the summer.

Mia Myers, the bus driver and teacher, helps students learn real-life skills not always taught in classrooms. She helps students practice filling out job applications and puts them through mock interviews. She teaches about investing and saving money, credit and balancing checkbooks. She talks about small businesses and being an entrepreneur.

"When they get excited about their life, that is what I like to see," Myers said. "And when they start asking questions, that is what it is all about."

The Wheels of Dreams is sponsored by the Atlanta Regional Black McDonald's Operators Association.

John Hurt, one of its members, said the group was talking in 2002 about a way to give back to the communities that helped make their restaurants successful. They chatted about establishing a program in a school but realized that the program would reach more students if it traveled to many schools.

They sold Coke floats in their restaurants and designated the profits to support the bus. They started a golf tournament fund-raiser and approached other businesses, such as Coca-Cola and Georgia Power, for donations.

They outfitted the bus with computer-learning stations so students could work through programs at their own pace. The bus will stay at a school for four to seven weeks, giving many students a chance to come in for multiple classes either during school or after.

Hurt said the McDonald's owners were inspired to start the program by seeing teens come in to their restaurants looking for jobs who were unprepared to fill out applications or sit for interviews.

"They didn't know how you were supposed to dress, how you are supposed to carry yourself, how you are supposed to look the other person in the eye during the interview," Hurt said.

"So we felt like if we had the Wheels of Dreams bus, we could help people understand what it takes to get a job."

The programming expanded to include teaching on entrepreneurship, civic responsibility and other life skills.

They are helping students go to college as well. The group began annually awarding six \$4,000 scholarships two years ago.

Myers said she has up to 40 hours of classes she can teach or supervise.

Miller Johnson, a senior at Frederick Douglass High School, finished all 40 hours during a recent stopover.

Johnson, who has been accepted next year at the University of Florida and Fort Valley State University, said he has already put some of the skills he learned to the test. He resigned his job as a lifeguard and applied and interviewed as a cashier at a local business.

And he learned about what to do with his money, such as making investments.

"I was here mostly learning about finance and how to use your money," he said. "There are a lot of places you can put your money other than in a savings account."

RENEE HANNANS HENRY / Staff Photo

Mia Myers is the bus driver and teacher on the Wheels of Dreams, which helps teens learn real-life skills. The bus, outfitted with computer-learning stations, will visit a school for up to seven weeks. The program is sponsored by the Atlanta Regional Black McDonald's Operators Association.



Photo

RENEE HANNANS HENRY / Staff

"When they get excited about their life, that is what I like to see," says Myers, who helps teens practice filling out job applications and teaches money management.



