

PRESS RELEASE

Camden Youth Build Dog Sleds & learn to mush

Local nonprofit, UrbanPromise gets Camden youth excited about history, carpentry and the lost sport of dog sledding.

Camden, NJ February 20, 2010: For the last four months six students who attend UrbanPromise after school program in South Camden along with four mentors having been building two, full scale replicas of the sleds used by North Pole explorers Matthew Henson and Robert Perry to reach the North Pole.

Students meet every Tuesday & Thursday afternoon with their mentors in the basement of the Camden Seaport and Maritime Museum on Broadway in South Camden. As the sleds take shape, the students are learning about power tools like saws, drill, jigs, steam boxes, and materials like dowels, wood glue, oak, hickory and steel. (There is a statue of Matthew Henson in front of the museum because part of the church fellowship hall was built with ballast stones from the Kite one of the ships used by Henson and Perry to sail to Baffin Bay off the coast of Greenland to make their assault on the North Pole.)

In early March, the students and mentors will join an experienced sled dog owner and musher, to hitch a team of 7 dogs to the sleds and run them across the snow. Who could imagine that young people of South Camden would be engaged in such a courageous adventure enjoy this journey, not to the North Pole but to a place of learning, understanding, mutual encouragement and great fun.

Students will be meeting on Tuesday & Thursday afternoons from 3:30-5:30pm throughout Febuary to complete the building of the sleds.

To learn more about the work UrbanPromise is doing in Camden, New Jersey visit www.urbanpromiseusa.org

About UrbanPromise

UrbanPromise has one clear mission, to build a city of promise, one child at a time. By equipping Camden's children and young adults with the skills necessary for academic achievement and moreover, life management, UrbanPromise has grown from a tiny summer camp program to a multifaceted institution with a reputation of solidarity and success. Among their many programs are private schools for grades k-12, after school programs, summer camps, and various other recreational and educational programs, each targeting different parts of the lives of Camden's youth. Learn more about UrbanPromise at www.urbanpromiseusa.org

Additional info about explorers Matthew Henson & Robert Peary

Henson and Peary shared a strong drive to be the first to reach the North Pole. Henson, born in 1866 just one year after slaves were declared free - lost both parents by the time he was 12. Against almost immeasurable odds from racial prejudice to loss of parents, Henson never lost his dream of adventure. Almost certainly it was his hunger for adventure that motivated his walk from Washington, DC to Baltimore, MD when at the age of 12 he secured an opportunity as a valet on the merchant ship the Katie Hines under the leadership of Captain Childs.

Matt Henson served as cabin boy to Childs who took a liking to the young boy and taught him geography, history, mathematics, and basic navigation. Matt also learned to love great literature, as well as becoming a skilled carpenter, rigger, mechanic and expert seaman. Five years at sea ended when Captain Childs died. At the time the jobs available to Black men were bell boy, dock worker, or servant, Matt, was able to get a job as a clerk in a hat shop and it was there that his life took an incredible change in direction when he met Robert Peary. Peary hired Henson to assist him in exploration of Nicaragua and from there they formed a bond around Peary's dream of reaching the North Pole. Their journey together ended up being 22 years of difficulty and 8 expeditions before achieving their goal.

On April 6, 1909 Henson, Peary and 4 Inuit people, indigenous to the Arctic regions of Canada and Greenland, reached the North Pole.

Available for comments or interviews:

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