

Inauguration excitement in the air, Urban League sending two clients

*By Alvin A. Reid of the St. Louis American
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Devin James will be among hundreds of St. Louis-area residents who will be in Washington, D.C. next week for the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States Barack Obama.

James, an Illinois College freshman, couldn't hide his enthusiasm when saying, "I'm excited. Very excited, very excited," when asked about his trip to the historic event.

And he admits that he is looking forward to Tuesday night's festivities as well.

"The ball," he said. "When people ask me about the trip, the first thing they ask about is the ball I'm going to. I had never given that aspect much thought, but I'm excited about meeting senators and maybe even shaking President Obama's hand."

James will be in Washington as part of the Presidential Inaugural Conference. The journey actually began in summer 2006 when he was a Westminster Christian Academy student and he attended a National Youth Leadership Forum on Medicine at UCLA

That led to him being selected for the inaugural event. But there was no way to know that he would witness the most historic presidential inauguration since George Washington's or Abraham Lincoln's.

"I can't wait," he said.

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis is sending two of its program participants on an all-expenses paid trip to the inauguration courtesy of the People's Inaugural Project and the National Urban League.

Carmen McNairy of St. Clair County and Victoria Brown of Florissant, have been chosen by the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis to attend this event.

McNairy has been a participant in the Urban League's Financial Literacy, Individual Development Account and Pre-Purchase Home Buying programs and that dedication enabled her to purchase a home for her family of three children.

Brown, the victim of a violent crime as she prepared to attend college, received counseling to address her fears of being victimized at school. She then participated in the Urban League's Business Training Center where she enrolled in a computer-training course.

Brown is again on the college track and recently completed an Introduction to College course offered at the Urban League's St. Louis County office in partnership with St. Louis Community College.

"It feels awesome! I'm building a memory book so that I can tell my grandchildren about my attendance in this historical moment," Brown said.

"We are glad to help those who are less fortunate participate in such a monumental event in American history," said James H. Buford, president and CEO of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis.

Earl Stafford, CEO and chairman of UNITECH, INC., a telecommunications firm located in Fairfax County, Va., established the People's Inaugural Project. The Stafford Foundation has donated more than \$1 million to give socially and economically disadvantaged individuals the opportunity to attend the presidential inauguration.

In addition to the Inauguration Parade, guests will also attend a prayer breakfast, Martin Luther King Jr. Luncheon and an Inaugural Ball. The foundation will also provide guests with lodging, food, beauticians, ball gowns and tuxedos, if necessary.

"We wanted to bless those who otherwise wouldn't have an opportunity to be a part of the great celebration, the inauguration and the festivities," said Stafford.