

Presentation of Gift from Stuyvesant Heights Montessori

“Generosity comes in all sizes,” announced Tony Award-winning actress Phylicia Rashad, mistress of the groundbreaking ceremony. She was speaking about the gift presentation from two four-year-old donors, Ajani Grant and Piper Shillingford.

The young philanthropists, representing the Stuyvesant Heights Montessori in Brooklyn, New York, crossed the stage to present NMAAHC Director Lonnie Bunch with a can of coins collected from friends and family. As Director Bunch accepted the can, he acknowledged the “wonderful array of donors and supporters” who have contributed to the Museum, including these youngest donors.

Inspired by the creation of the new Museum, Tracey Mina, head of school, created a campaign – “Giving Change to Make a Change” – to involve her students in a fundraising exercise.

“I told the children that they could give money to help others learn some of the great things that they had learned,” she said.

Her students used small metal canisters to collect change from friends and families, eventually gathering \$650, showing that no gift is too small to make a difference.

Not only did the students collect the change, but each class also created a book that documented an era in African American history. As the students created their books, they learned about the accomplishments and contributions of Blacks throughout history, with topics covering sharecropping, “hands that built the White House,” boycotts, the Underground Railroad, and the Freedom Riders. The books, which accompanied the contribution, will be archived in the collections of NMAAHC.

Director Bunch said that he was very moved by this gift, which also reconnected him to Ms. Mina, who had been his student. When he learned about the children’s efforts, he invited the school to attend the groundbreaking ceremony.

The students, accompanied by their families and friends – 160 in all – traveled by car, train, and bus to Washington, D.C. Dressed in their finest clothes, the children enjoyed a breakfast of orange juice and muffins, listened to the music and speeches, and proudly wore their commemorative pins to mark the occasion.

The presentation of the gift received cheers, especially when the children received hugs from the President. Piper Shillingford stepped behind Director Bunch with purpose. “Hi, Mrs. Obama,” she said, receiving a hug from the First Lady as well.

One parent, echoing the sentiments of many of her fellow travelers, described the experience as “memorable and moving” and an “opportunity to be a part of history.”



NMAAHC Director Lonnie Bunch greets students from the Stuyvesant Heights Montessori school.