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Tarrant students heading to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration



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BY ANNA M. TINSLEY
atinsley@star-telegram.com

FORT WORTH — Austin McBee can still hardly believe it.

On Friday, the 17-year-old Arlington Heights High School senior will be standing in the National Mall, surrounded by thousands of people from across the country, watching Republican Donald Trump take the oath of office to become the country's 45th president.

"I'm very excited," he said. "I've been looking forward to it for a while."

McBee is among the countless North Texans heading to D.C. for Friday's inauguration and Saturday's Women's March on Washington.

He's also among the 2,500 students heading to the nation's capitol for a five-day Envision Presidential Inauguration Leadership Summit, which will give them a chance to talk to world leaders and celebrities in their effort to develop possible solutions to problems plaguing the country.

"It's really cool," said Hayden Flowers, an eighth-grader at Westlake Academy who is also attending the inauguration and summit. "I really want to see how the inauguration works and watch [Trump] put his hand on the Bible" to take the presidential oath.

For many of the students, this trip culminates more than a year of keeping up with an over-the-top election year that touched on issues ranging from illegal votes to Russian interference in the election, since no one knew who would win the presidency when they signed up for the trip a year ago.

"I know the summit will be fun and cool and I'll learn a lot," McBee said. "But, obviously, the inauguration will take the cake."

Finding solutions

Middle school, high school and college students from across the country will participate in the summit that runs from Wednesday through Sunday.

195

Number of the 2,500 participating students who are from Texas

Of the 2,500 participants, 195 are from Texas and 13 — including McBee and Flowers — are from Tarrant County, organizers say.

While there, students will be part of Delegations for Change, an "experiential education component" where they can work together to "generate solutions to real-world challenges that the next president and their generation will face."

During the summit, students will break into groups to explore a handful of topics: women in leadership, healthcare, human capital, technology, foreign relations or the environment.

Sophie Yuill, a junior at Trinity Valley School, is also going, and she hopes to work on the healthcare or women in leadership teams.

“I love watching politics and I love keeping up with it,” the 16-year-old said.

She and others will have a front-row seat to history, hearing from speakers such as General Colin Powell, Spike Lee, Carly Fiorina, Ann Compton, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Malala Yousafzai and Paul Begala.

For Flowers, a highlight of the trip will be seeing Yousafzai, the women’s rights activist in Pakistan who was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in 2012 but survived.

“She’s my role model,” the 13-year-old Westlake girl said.

She and others will work on solving next-generation problems through a *Shark Tank*-type process.

Their final conclusions and recommendations on each of the key topics will be published in a statement paper and sent to Trump and Congress.

“The Presidential Inauguration Leadership Summit is specifically designed to empower next-generation leaders to engage in the political process and gain a deeper understanding to evaluate and develop solutions for some of the nation’s most important issues,” said Duncan Young, CEO of Envision, a company geared to expand learning experiences for students.

“This election cycle has been one of the most divisive we’ve seen in recent history, yet we’re seeing students from all over the country, with different views and life experiences, wanting to collaborate and work together to solve issues that their generation will face in later years.”

Looking ahead

Heather Olivia Shannon, a 21-year-old junior at Texas Tech University, will be among those attending the summit and the inauguration — and reporting on her experiences for Tech’s *Daily Toreador* newspaper.

The Paschal High School graduate became interested in politics last year when, as a Tarrant County College student and reporter for *TCC Writes Magazine*, she attended a local Trump press conference and rally.

She became involved with Envision last year, when she went on an international relations and diplomacy trip with the group to China. Now it’s on to Washington, D.C.

“I’ve gotten interested in politics,” she said. “I want to share my thoughts and worldview.”

As for McBee, he first became involved with Envision his freshman year in high school.

By the next year, he was among a dozen students chosen to be Chase the Race reporters during the presidential election. He landed the assignment of covering the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, interviewing people about the youth perspective in the 2016 presidential election.

He said he interviewed Republicans inside and Democrats and others outside the convention.

“There were all sorts of people I hadn’t been exposed to before,” McBee said. “I spoke to all of them and I really got a new perspective about how everyone has beliefs. They’re not all going to be the same as everyone else’s and that’s good, very good.”

All 12 Chase the Race reporters were invited to attend this presidential inaugural summit.

‘The whole process’

Flowers became involved with Envision last year, when she participated in a leadership program in D.C.

And Yuill learned about the group her freshman year, when she attended a business-related seminar in Dallas.

Now, Yuill said, she can’t wait to attend the summit.

But she’s also looking forward to the inauguration.

“I think it will be very interesting to see President Obama and President-elect Donald Trump in the same place,” Yuill said. “The day of the inauguration, we leave the hotel at 4 or 5 a.m. to see everyone celebrating and see what D.C. is like that day.

“I’m really excited to see the whole process.”



Mother and daughter going to DC during inauguration

Amy and Harper Williams will participate in Women's March on Washington. Star-Telegram/Joyce Marshall

Anna Tinsley: 817-390-7610, @annatinsley



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