

CHAPTER OF THE YEAR!



St. Louis NSBE Jr. and NSBE Professionals members, at the 2015 Annual Convention

ST. LOUIS METRO GATEWAY NSBE JR. RISES ABOVE RACIAL TURMOIL

BY KEVIN M. BRISCOE

Recent events have made their city a ground zero for racial intolerance and violence, but these black youth, supported by good mentors and healthy resources, have gained fame within NSBE for a different reason. The St. Louis Metro Gateway chapter is the 2014–15 NSBE Jr. Chapter of the Year. Housed at the Florissant Valley campus of St. Louis Community College, in Ferguson, Mo., the chapter is positively characterized by a host of programs and initiatives.

St. Louis Metro Gateway NSBE Jr. was selected as top chapter during the National Society of Black Engineers' (NSBE's) Annual Convention in Anaheim, Calif., this past March. The chapter supports the Society's national mission by developing a local environment for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education and by fostering an increase in the number of underserved youth seeking a STEM education.

"The mission of my NSBE chapter is to provide students with a necessary introduction and exposure to the basic principles of

engineering," says Shawn Blake Fields, vice president of the chapter, who adds that he will pursue a college degree in mechanical engineering. "This NSBE chapter helps students open their minds to the world of engineering in a form and intensity that they would not receive at a normal middle or high school."

SENSE OF FAMILY

St. Louis Metro Gateway NSBE Jr. consists of 120 students who meet every third Saturday to participate in NSBE

Pre-College Initiative activities. With the support of 20 members of NSBE's St. Louis Metro Gateway Professionals Chapter, the NSBE Jr. group also partners with other local NSBE chapters and has participated in a number of events designed to promote STEM in the black community. Those events have included the Delta Sigma Theta Academy STEAM Program, the St. Louis Science Center Martin Luther King, Jr. Science Showcase, the Discovery Fair with the St. Louis Engineers Club and NSBE's "A Walk for Education."

"We have created a network amongst our parents, students, collegiate (students) and professionals that provides a sense of family," says Deborah Dilworth, parent liaison for the NSBE Jr. chapter and programs chair for the St. Louis Metro Gateway Professionals Chapter. "The (NSBE Jr.) chapter introduces different pathways to the world of engineering and technology for students who have a love for science or math, she adds, "showcasing the importance of engineering and how engineers help make or design everything in the world. Engineers are real-world dream makers."

The chapter's "family tree," so to speak, includes a number of branches, all of which have touched its members.

"I have been a member of the St. Louis (NSBE Jr.) chapter since sixth grade," says Olivia Martin, president of the chapter and a student at the Mary Institute and St. Louis Country Day School in Ladue, Mo. "And now, as an 11th grader, I've had many opportunities and the support of the entire mentoring team, which has not only helped me understand more about becoming an engineer...it has also helped me develop my public speaking.

"Most importantly," Olivia adds, "my mentors believe in me and believe that I can, as an African-American female, become an engineer and attend colleges like Vanderbilt and Washington University."

TEACHABLE MOMENT

Sad to say, even an organization as vibrant as the St. Louis Metro Gateway chapter could not escape the aftermath of the shooting death of Michael Brown, an 18-year-old African-American male, at the hands of Darren Wilson, a 28-year-old white Ferguson policeman. Amidst the ensuing protests — peaceful and otherwise — the chapter remained engaged in the community in which it operates.

"In relation to the Ferguson incident," says Shawn Fields, "the chapter has used it as an opportunity to stress the importance of working hard throughout high school and into college so that we will be able to give back and benefit our community."

NSBE's national leadership has also addressed the Ferguson shooting and injustice against residents of black communities across the country. The "Help NSBE Impact Ferguson Campaign"



(clockwise, from bottom right) Three photos from the chapter's "A Walk for Education" event, for members and the community; (top right) computer-aided design instruction at a monthly chapter meeting

raised more than \$3,600 to increase the exposure of youth in metropolitan St. Louis to information about STEM careers.

Being located within the Ferguson city limits prompted the NSBE Jr. chapter to work to bring more students into the group.

"There was a concerted effort to increase the visibility of the program as a counter-narrative to the one that had been presented in the media," says Terrence L. Freeman, Ph.D., who is a member of NSBE's St. Louis Professionals and a profes-

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sor of mechanical engineering at St. Louis Community College. "Our students come to Ferguson, but not all of them are from Ferguson. They have participated in forums and discussions that focus on leadership, principles and values, decision-making and social justice. This has been a tragic but teachable moment for the students in the program."

"As a person who lives in Ferguson, I understand that change was required in all St. Louis communities and across the nation," says Ronald Moore, who is Pre-College Initiative director for the St. Louis NSBE Professionals chapter. "We must strive to ensure that majority-black communities maintain and increase their value, so that we can build wealth for our children and our children's children." ■

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