

Willow Meadows youth want 'art car' to be message of hope

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Everyone's
Art Car
Parade in
Houston
featured a
join effort
by Willow
Meadows
Baptist
Church
youth and
Katrina
evacuees.

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By Karen Campbell

Union Baptist Association

HOUSTON—Take a late 1980s mud-racing Buick, add the exuberance of youth and the perspective of Katrina evacuees, plus a little paint and creativity with a touch of faith-based hope and an Art Car is born.

This year’s recent Everyone’s Art Car Parade featured the usual array of lowriders, classic cars, and what can only be termed “rolling contraptions” among the more than 250 entries in an annual event that attracts more than 200,000 spectators.



The lineup also included a combined project of Willow Meadows Baptist youth and Katrina evacuees, illustrating vividly that “expressions of faith” can take many forms.

Susan Brock, who has worked with the church youth art team for the last three years and served as co-director for the Katrina shelter/relief efforts at Willow Meadows, first saw a potential link between the previously planned parade entry and the need to address a growing negative public reaction to Katrina evacuees.

“I know that once the crisis mode finished, there was a lot of unrest in me, and it helped to talk to other people about it, and I know that it’s provided a piece of that for the kids. If they can get a grip on what they just came through and get some positive message about it ... that’s what we hope the car can do,” Brock explained.

During the months the youth from New Orleans and Houston have worked on their own testament to unity, they were peppered with reports of Katrina evacuees tied to various acts of violence and school disturbances.


Kristen Johnson from Willow Meadows Baptist Church in Houston puts some creativity into the project.

The Houston Chronicle reported a study by Rice University sociologist Stephen Klineberg that revealed Houston residents have grown “increasingly weary and wary of the 150,000 Louisiana evacuees” who settled in Harris County. Three-fourths of the Houston-area residents surveyed said the influx of Katrina evacuees has put a considerable strain on the Houston community, and two-thirds said evacuees bear

responsibility for a major increase in violent crime. Many said Houston will be “worse off” rather than “better off” if most evacuees remain here permanently.

Willow Meadows believes there is another, relatively untold story, and the Art Car makes for a vivid illustration in the unfolding tale.

“The only requirement we had was that it be completed on time, that it deal with Katrina, and it had to have Christian message,” Brock said.

The youth determined Mardi Gras colors would be a key element to the car, as well as a depiction of rising waters and an interactive element that has allowed the creators to offer up life lessons on the chalkboard-like sides.

“We wanted to engage people with not just art they look at but art that involves them on a deeper level,” Brock said of the invitation to respond which will be offered to the crowd during the parade’s weekend festivities.

With New Orleans youth concentrating on one side of the car and Willow Meadows youth addressing the other, the roof is where the two communities came together in what is intended to be a message of hope.



Ross
Childs and
Victor
Sanchez
from
Willow
Meadows
Baptist
Church in
Houston
take a
break
from
decorating
their Art
Car.

“The experience of the car, working on it, interacting with it, is kind of a therapy and more important than the artistic expression. The experience is the goal—not the final project,” Brock concluded.

Willow Meadows has no plans to keep the car, and Brock hints it may return to mud racing and continue to tell the Katrina story.

“One of the lessons that has already been written on the car is that it’s the people you know, not the stuff, that matters,” he said. “So, by not keeping the car, we’re not holding on to it. We’re letting go.”

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