

Young aviation world record holders may have solution to city's 'brain drain'.

By **Robbin L. Melton Frost Illustrated-Ft. Wayne Indiana**



Jimmy Haywood and Kenny Roy, pilots from Compton, Calif., are aviation world record holders. Photo courtesy of Tomorrow's Aeronautical Museum

Local "brain drain" continues to be a hot topic among certain circles throughout Fort Wayne. The solution, however, is simple given that local youths say the problem is there's nothing for them to do in Fort Wayne, so there's no reason for them to stay. With the help of two young African American men from Compton, Calif., Friends of Bethany is taking its first step toward resolving that problem by hosting "Taking Flight," a motivational program for local youths and the community.

Not old enough to drive, Jimmy Haywood and Kenny Roy have already accomplished what most adults never even dream about— setting world records. Both young men will share their inspirational stories with the Fort Wayne community and sign autographs during Friends of Bethany's "Taking Flight" program scheduled to be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Oct. 1 at Smith Field. Their visit comes on the tail end of a one-year anniversary celebration in Compton, Calif.

On Sept. 23, 2004, Haywood, 11, made history by setting a world aviation record as the youngest male to fly a plane on a round-trip international flight. Following on his heels, Roy, 14, set his own world record as the youngest licensed African American pilot to fly a plane, solo, from California to Canada. Both boys made their international flights under the guidance of a certified flight instructor for their 20-hour, roundtrip flight between Southern California and Vancouver, British Columbia.

Haywood and Roy are part of a mentoring program established by Robin Petgrave, co-founder and executive director of Tomorrow's Aeronautical Museum in Compton, which recruits young people for its Aerosquad After School Program which enables youths to work as volunteers at the Compton Woodley Airport in exchange for flight lessons.

The boys have gained international recognition for their successes from the Tuskegee Airmen, National Public Radio's Tavis Smiley Show and from as far away as Russia. They also spoke before the California Black Legislative Caucus and were officially commended Oct. 8, 2004 through a U.S. House of Representatives resolution.

“I learned about these boys through a Journal Gazette article last October on the back page,” said Rosa Chapman, founder and executive director of Friends of Bethany. “I was so excited to see these boys and their accomplishments, and this is something for all of our kids here. We’re trying to bring hope to our youth, but they need to see other kids achieve.”

Chapman said she spoke with her program manager, Janet Scales, about bringing the boys to Fort Wayne for Friends of Bethany’s Youth Explosion in August, but the idea expanded into the idea of hosting the first local event specifically to motivate area youths. “We thought it’d be a real motivational thing for our youth here to meet these boys,” said Chapman. “There should be programs like this here for our kids to do things like this and it doesn’t necessarily have to be in aviation. But, something’s got to happen.”

As part of their local visit, Haywood, Roy and Petgrave also are scheduled to meet with Harding High School, Prince Chapman Academy and Southwick Elementary staff and students on Sept. 30, and attend a reception at Lincoln Tower later that day.

“Taking Flight,” an event free and open to the public, is co-sponsored by Alpha Rae Personnel Inc. and One Voice One Vision, a Fort Wayne Weed and Seed initiative. Call Friends of Bethany at (260) 744-9027 for more information.