

# Florida field trip to expand horizons

State tour will introduce them to ways they can 'dream big'

By Kevin Robinson  
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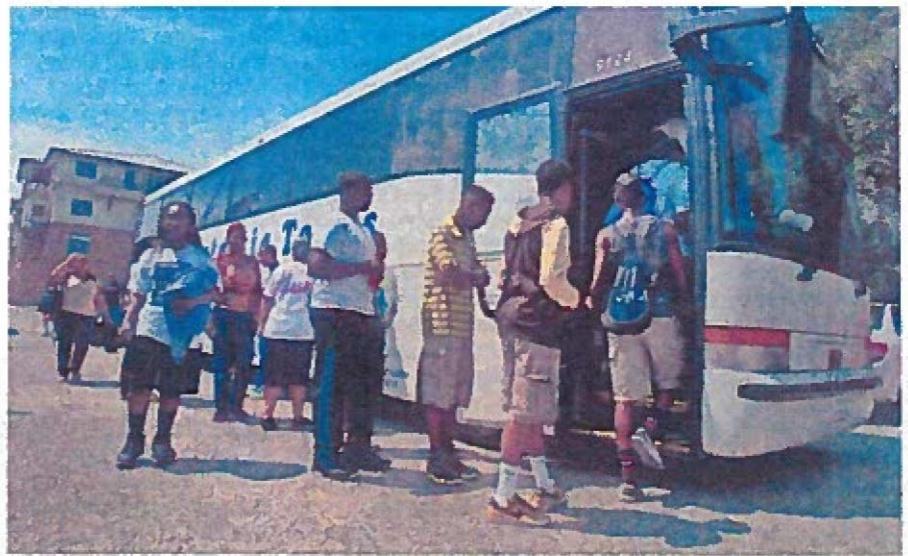
A street sign or a stretch of road doesn't mark the edge of the world, but it can seem that way to many children who spend most of their young lives within the borders of one neighborhood.

Pensacola Police Capt. David Alexander and volunteers for the JHT Safe Haven Development Center are hoping to teach those children there's a whole wide world out there beyond what they know.

"We want them to dream big," Alexander said. "We're exposing them to all the possibilities around them and teaching them if you dream big and you work for it, you can make it."

Alexander and a group of chaperones are taking about 40 children ages 11-18 on a two-day bus trip to Tallahassee and Tampa. The kids will get a lesson in government at the state capital, visit the University of South Florida and spend some

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A group of kids, parents and chaperones gather Friday in downtown Pensacola as they board a bus for a trip to Tampa. The kids were selected for the trip after showing excellence in studies or volunteer work and after completing the Kids and Cops program.

## Trip

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downtime at Busch Gardens.

The goal of the trip is for the kids to have fun, but also to learn something about the way the world works and what they want their place in it to be.

"We're asking them what they want to do in their future," Alexander said. "We're asking them to plan and visualize themselves doing what they want to do on a college campus."

The chaperones come from a variety of fields, but most of them grew up in the same neighborhoods as the kids. A pilot, law enforcement officers, health care workers and other professionals will devote some time during the trip to talk about what they do and the road they took to get

*"Most kids don't get to see outside their community. I've been out of my community a little bit, but this is something different."*

JEROME PUGH, 14-year-old program participant

there.

Jerome Pugh, 14, took an interest in aviation after meeting a pilot through Safe Haven, and now he is enrolled in the National Flight Academy. There, he already has piloted drones and assisted on cleanup operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

"It opened my eyes," Pugh said of his experiences. "Most kids don't get to see outside their community. I've been out of my community a little bit, but this is something different. It blew my mind."

Leah Robinson, 14, a member of the NAACP Youth Council, said she is hoping some of the teenagers on the trip take an

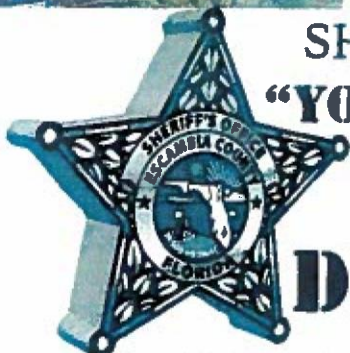
interest in government.

"They need to know what's going on, too," she said. "We live here, too, so if the government changes something and we don't know, then we end up in trouble."

The kids on the trip are there precisely because they stayed out of trouble. They spent the whole summer volunteering in their neighborhoods and churches.

Several parents said Safe Haven has expanded their horizons just as much as their children's.

"I never imagined my son would be a pilot," Pugh's mother Laurice Williams said. "Now he's doing something I never imagined and he never imagined."



SHERIFF DAVID MORGAN says,  
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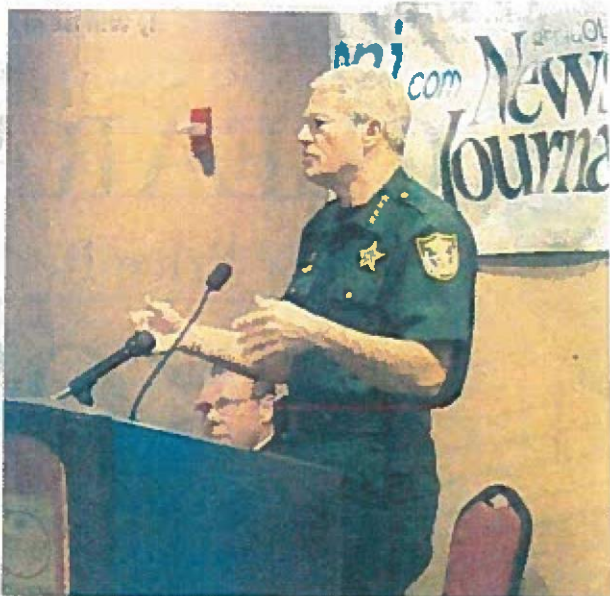




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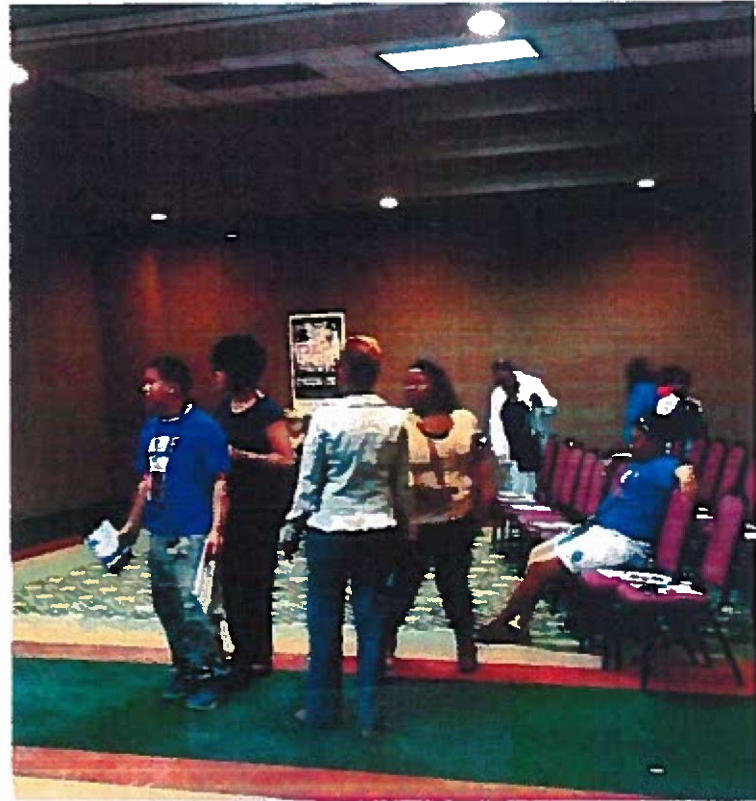
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Escambia County Sheriff David Morgan helps open the "Bridging the Gap" crime prevention summit at the Crowne Plaza on Wednesday morning.





**L**ittle Free Libraries are taking root all over the Pensacola area and are springing up faster than dandelions.

Just last month, the area had seven incorporated Little Free Libraries. As of Friday, though, there were 18, and more than 50 are expected to be established in the coming weeks.

"It's real grass roots," said Carolyn Appleyard, who helped establish the worldwide Little Libraries movement in the area. "That's what's so fun about it."

Community members gathered Friday morning at the Marie K. Young Wedgewood Community to welcome and celebrate two new Little Libraries, which were dedicated to the victims of homicide in the area with the slogan "Speak life to save a child."

Lavon Brown, president of the organization Parents Against Injustice & Negligence Inc., said

because Little Libraries encourage youth to read, they are one more way the community can take a stand against violence.

"I hope the kids take away knowledge and want to explore different opportunities they can have with reading," said Brown, whose son, Labar Brown, was shot and killed on Oct. 22, 2012. "Education promotes non-violence."

Across town at the Heritage Oaks RV Park on Gulf Beach Highway, Early Learning Coalition and Americorps volunteers, as well as local kids, were beginning to turn newspaper racks donated by the Pensacola News Journal into Little Free Libraries.

"This year alone, the Early Learning Coalition has given away 17,000 books to the community, and we wanted to find another way to do that," said Justine Olan, an outreach specialist with ELC. "So we joined up with the Little Free Libraries movement. And getting kids involved in the process of painting them really allows them to take ownership of it. They get to be involved in the process from the beginning and get excited about reading."

Neighborhood kids Tanner Blair, 13, and David Leivan, 10, were part of the effort at Heritage Oaks.

"I'm glad to be a part of it," said Tanner, a Bailey Middle School student. "I'm glad to be doing something that will help people and make



TONY GIBERSON/TGIBERSON@PNJ.COM

The Marie K. Young Wedgewood Community Center now has two Little Free Libraries, one outside and one inside.

### Little library coming to my neighborhood

I'm excited to announce that a Little Free Library is coming to my neighborhood next week. The library will be located at 3105 Raines St., and I would like to gather neighborhood kids to help my husband and I decorate it. More details on the project to come, so stay tuned to pnj.com and the Pensacola News Journal.

Jamie Secola

kids happy."

So was David, who had some specific designs in mind for one of the 15 newspaper racks soon to become Little Libraries.

"I'm going to make an Angry Bird," said David, referring to the popular video game created by Rovio Entertainment. "I'm going to do the red one."

It's that type of community outreach and youth involvement that makes Little Libraries

one way to increase reading and literacy among families. It's also a way to counter some of the negative things that often are associated with neighborhoods."

Appleyard echoed that sentiment when she addressed the crowd at the Wedgewood ceremony.

"What it's done for me is what I hope it will do for you," she said. "Yes, the books are important, but so are the (community) connections we make. The Wedgewood community is now not only connected to the 50 or so Little Libraries in the Pensacola area but also to the more than 15,000 personal library efforts (worldwide)."

special, said Pensacola Police Department Capt. David Alexander, who also is leading the effort to spread the libraries in the area.

"It really makes me feel good and reassures me that, as a law enforcement officer, there are people out there who are concerned about the community and who are concerned about the families," Alexander said following the Wedgewood event. "Certainly the Lit-



## **Why Officer Ernie?**

Young children rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds. In addition to their remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains, they exhibit dramatic progress in their emotional, social, regulatory, and moral capacities and begin to develop the attitudes and belief systems that craft the lens through which they will see our world and experience their lives. According to The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, what children learn in this period of development provides an “indelible blueprint” that establishes a “set of capabilities, orientations to the world, and expectations of how things and people will act and behave.” Though many factors contribute to and influence these intertwined dimensions of development, a child’s environment is one of the most important factors.

*Ernie* provides an interactive, engaging, and educational interface that helps children develop and enhance their linguistic and cognitive skills. The children’s individual’s interaction with *Ernie* facilitates competence and a sense of personal efficacy.

Though children are heavily influenced by the environments and culture they are raised in, they are not simply passive products of these influences. They are active agents who pick and choose selectively from among the influences to which they are exposed. By interacting with *Officer Ernie*, children would develop crucial cognitive, linguistic, and social skills, and would associate their positive, learning relationship with *Ernie* with Law Enforcement. At a pivotal point in their development, their experience with *Officer Ernie* would foster in children a trust in the Police and would associate Law Enforcement with a learning environment through which they attained growth, stability, and achievement. *Officer Ernie* would serve his community through education and would cultivate a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation with the future members of the community.