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ROBERT TAYLOR RESIDENT TRAVELS TO PRAGUE

Journey made possible through Windows of Opportunity special academic award, other donors

July 30, 2003

Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) resident LaToya Wolfe has traveled before, but never this far. She has welcomed the opportunity to visit Prague, located in the Czech Republic – more than 4,500 miles from the building where she lives at 51st and Federal.

“At first, going to Prague was just an idea, a concept. It didn’t really hit me until a few weeks ago that I was really going – and it floored me,” Wolfe said. “I’m aware that it’s a privilege not many people, especially from where I grew up, get to have -- and that means I have more responsibility to give back.”

The aspiring novelist, an A-student in the Fiction Writing Program at Chicago’s Columbia College, wanted to join other students and faculty on a five-week excursion to what is widely considered one of the foremost creative centers in the world, but she had one problem – money.

During an African-American History Month Celebration, Wolfe mentioned her desire to go. Windows of Opportunity, Inc., the CHA’s not-for-profit affiliate, found out – and went into action.

“Supporting a promising and talented student like Latoya was, in my view, an imperative for Windows and well within our mission – to improve the quality of life of public and assisted housing residents,” said Gwen Rice, Executive Director of Windows of Opportunity. “To do this, we needed a vehicle not only to assist Latoya but other students as well who, without added resources, would have to miss out on life-changing educational experiences.”

The Windows Board of Directors established the Windows of Opportunity Academic Excellence Award. Different from the Scholarship Program, the Academic Excellence Award honors students who have exceptional grade point averages, are very active in their respective communities and who have unique opportunities for their educational development.

Windows plans to give out up to two such awards each year, at a maximum of \$5,000 each. Wolfe is the first recipient.

But before Windows supplied the bulk of the payment for Wolfe’s \$6,000 trip

to Prague, the young lady got some help from the place where she used to work and mentor children – the Charles Hayes Family Investment Center, located at 4859 S. Wabash, not far from where she grew up.

“Our contribution to LaToya Wolfe’s educational excursion to Prague is simply a part of our ongoing investment in youth and adults who reside in public housing,” notes President & CEO Zenobia Johnson-Black. “And, like any good investment, it has and will continue to produce dividends – not just for one individual but for our entire community. LaToya is a role model and inspiration for all here at the Hayes Family Investment Center, and we are delighted that we could help make her trip possible.”

Still slightly short of what was needed for the trip, Wolfe got help from other donors, including Marv Dyson, President and General Manager of WGCI AM/FM radio in Chicago.

Wolfe says she doesn’t quite know what to expect, but knows the experience will change her forever. It is the kind of exposure she wishes were possible for more young people from public housing developments.

“I’m sure a lot of people have the aspiration to do things but don’t have the money. So they easily dismiss their dreams,” she said, adding that now she knows “anything is possible.”

For those interested in helping other public housing residents achieve their educational dreams, please contact Windows of Opportunity at 312-441-0389.