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BLACK IN TIME

Dance camp promotes Ailey's dream

BY DOROTHY JENKINS FIELDS
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This summer was a time for family, fun and life skills for 100 Miami-Dade County middle school students participating in the Alvin Ailey Camp, June 27-Aug. 6 at the Adrienne Arsht Center of the Performing Arts in downtown Miami.

At AileyCamp, inner-city kids, ages 11-14, experience an intense six weeks of classes in dance, as well as life skills such as nutrition and communication. The idea for a summer camp, where dance is the focus, began more than 20 years ago as a dream shared by Alvin Ailey, the founding



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artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York, and volunteers at the

Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey.

Ailey, the internationally known dancer and choreographer, grew up in a segregated society with Jim Crow laws that limited black people in every phase of life, because of their race. With limited resources he knew what it was like to spend a summer in the hot city with little to do. He understood how dancing

could make a summer spin into action, taking with it a stage full of energetic youngsters to destinations yet unimagined. He cared not only about dance, but about the next generation.

Judith Jamieson succeeded Alvin Ailey as artistic director of the theater, followed by the current artistic director, Robert Battle, who grew up in Liberty City.

Through hard work and many challenges, Ailey demonstrated that in spite of limitations everyone should strive to succeed. According to the camp's national director Nasha Thomas-Schmitt, "Ailey created work from his own

experiences and we encourage the children to do the same."

Open to boys and girls, students learn that dancing is a physical activity as demanding as sports. They finish camp with valuable life skills for navigating adolescence and a sense of accomplishment as they enter the challenging high school years.

The first camp began in 1989, in Kansas City. Today, there are 10 AileyCamps in cities throughout the country: Atlanta; Berkeley, Calif.; Boston; Bridgeport, Conn.; Chicago; Kansas City, Mo.; Kansas City, Kan.; Newark, N.J.; and Washington Heights, N.Y.

The Miami AileyCamp began in 2009. This nationally acclaimed youth program is presented by the Adrienne Arsht Center of Miami-Dade County with generous support from The Miami Foundation along with leadership support from Lynn and Frank Scaduto; the Israel, Rose, Henry and Robert Wiener Foundation; William Fox Jr. Foundation, Susan Fox-Rosellini, trustee; and Larry and Molly Harris.

Students receive full scholarships for instruction in jazz, ballet, African and modern dance and personal growth lessons; uniforms and meals. The application and interview process are

held in the spring. Parents and guardians may contact: Aileycamp@artshtcenter.org.

AileyCamp Miami's 2011 final performance was titled, "Transcendence."

The beginning multimedia presentation highlighted once-shy students who told their stories of transformation after only six weeks of dance training and personal-development activities.

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