

## Mighty Men of Bethel Hosts the 7th Annual Paper Airplane Contest

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Pictured are participants and mentors of the Mighty Men of Bethel A.M.E. Church's 7th Annual Paper Airplane Contest. (Photo Credit: Crittenden K. Ward)

On Saturday, February 20, 2016 the Mighty Men of Bethel A.M.E. Church, Oxnard hosted their 7TH Annual Paper Airplane Contest, part of a male youth mentor program called "Come Fly with Me." It was held at the Juan Soria Elementary School in Oxnard from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. 15 young men received instruction in the aerodynamics of flight and then made paper airplanes to compete in three categories; distance, acrobatics, and design. Speakers also covered subjects critical to the success of young men of color including the ingredients for success and the value of perseverance.

While the program is centered on a paper airplane competition, it is so, so much more. It serves as a mentoring program, where the line of communication between young men and adult men is fostered; where there is instruction in black history with the story of the Tuskegee Airmen serving as a central theme; and, where there are presentations made in subjects that provide valuable life skills including the ingredients to success and the value of perseverance. A continental breakfast greeted the young men and a full lunch, courtesy of the Psi Xi Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., was provided.



The speakers for this year's program were as follows: Rev. Al Duff, Jr., Associate Minister at St. Paul Baptist Church of Oxnard; Mr. Vincent Stewart, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy and community activist; and, Mr. John Knopp, C.A.F.S.C.W., Volunteer and Historian of WW II airplanes and model showcase at the Commemorative Air Force Southern California Wing Aviation Museum at Camarillo Airport. Rev. Dr. Clyde Oden Jr., Pastor of Bethel opened the festivities with prayer and welcomed the program participants and mentors.

The highlight of the program always has been the competition. The participants compete in three age categories and 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners are selected within each group. Paper airplane entries are judged for design, flight distance and aerobatics. Each young man received a Certificate of Recognition for their participation.

This program has evolved to take place over three activities. On January 30, the young men were treated to a field trip and workshop at the Commemorative Air Force Southern California Wing Aviation Museum at Camarillo Airport which included brunch at the Waypoint Café. The PAC competition is the second activity and the final activity, the 7TH Annual PAC Awards Banquet, will be held on Sunday, March 20, 2016 following the morning worship service. There will be a guest speaker speaking on the Tuskegee Airmen, and a banquet meal provided. Trophies and other awards will be presented to the competition winners.

The PAC is the "brainchild" of Leroy A. "Buddy" Gibson, Jr. who serves as PAC Project Chairman. Lawrence Lee of Oxnard has participated in the program from inception through his initiative, H.E.R.O.E.S. (Honoring Excellence Regardless of Ethnic Stigma). H.E.R.O.E.S. is a mobile museum of black military figurines. Other mentors who participated were: Rev. Dennis Holloway, Marvin McKenzie, William Bradley, Ron Greenwood, Wallace Dailey, Bruce T. Stewart, Crittenden K. Ward, Horace Booker, Bill Johnson, and John Hill.