

IN THE NEWS

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Former State Rep. Robin Smith Told Local Camp REACH Teens That Being Good Christians Makes Good Citizens

By Aaron Capp Tarver

Being born in America makes a person an American citizen and living in Chattanooga makes him a citizen of the city, but people who believe in Jesus Christ have the most important citizenship because that citizenship is eternal, said former State Rep. Robin Smith.

"We get so fixated on the here and now: school, parents, drama, Tic Toc, Instagram. Those are all important but you know what is most important? It's that you were created in the image of God," said Smith.

She spoke this month to more than 40 teens attending Camp REACH, a summer career camp hosted by the Mary Walker Foundation at Hope City Church. REACH is an acronym for Respect, Earn (money) Achievement, Citizenship and Hardwork.

Grayson Strickland, a 14-year-old freshman at Chattanooga Preparatory School attending REACH, was among several teens attentive to Smith's presentation.

"She talked about how the nation was created," said Grayson.

"She told us about caring for other people," said Jaziah Pinkerton. Jaziah is a 15-year-old Brainerd High School sophomore attending the camp.

Smith is one of several speakers who shared insights and experiences this summer. Other speakers included Frenise Mann, owner of Mann Financial Consulting; author and entrepreneur Lakweshia Ewing, who discussed race and diversity; and singer Willie Kitchens of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame group The Impressions, who discussed stage presence and music.

"We want to bring talented speakers and people who have been exposed to the

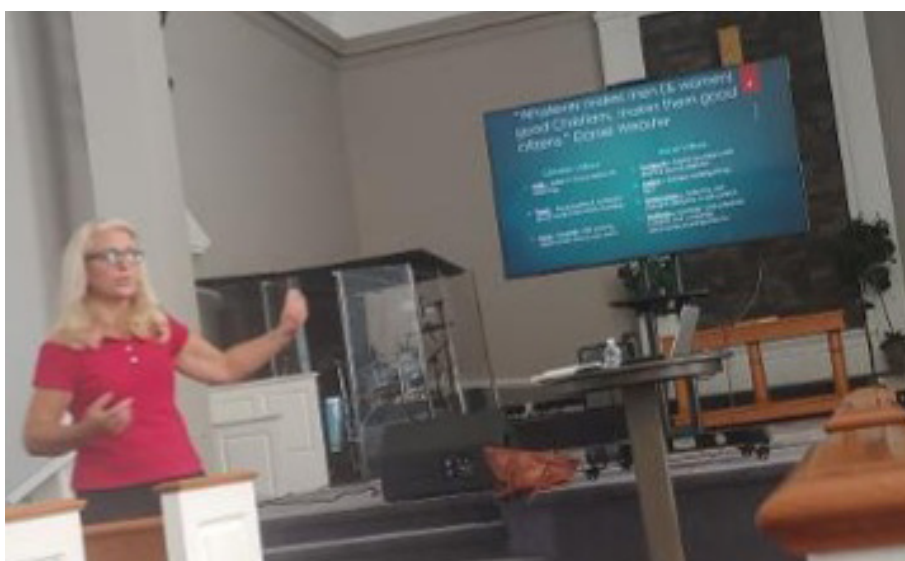


Photo of former State Rep. Robin Smith was taken by Camp REACH photographer Ken'Zhia Whitaker, a 15-year-old student at East Hamilton High School.

world to help students understand there is a lot out there that they haven't been exposed to," said Lurone "Coach" Jennings, executive director of the Mary Walker Foundation.

"We want to give them insights on things to think about for their own future and help them plan their future beyond what they know about from their immediate surroundings."

Smith, a Republican, was elected as the Representative for Tennessee's 26th State House District in 2018. She resigned in March.

She told students that she made mistakes and that God forgives and redeems people. She gave the dictionary definition of citizenship but also talked about the opportunity that each of them has to be citizens of heaven.

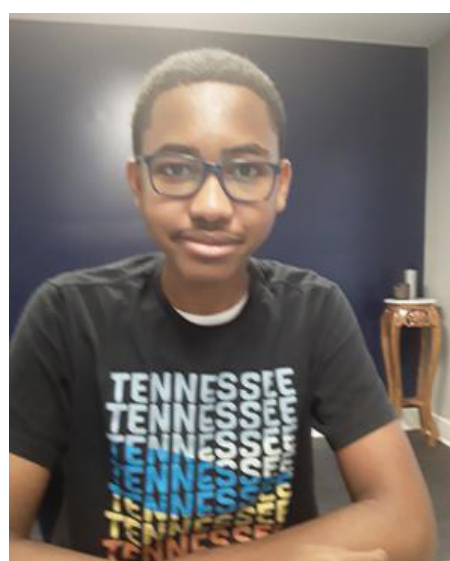
Then she explained the benefits of being an American citizen compared to

being a citizen of other countries.

Americans have the freedom to express themselves and to worship as they wish. They have a right to a prompt and fair trial by a jury. They also have the right to vote in elections for public officials, to own property and to pursue their dreams, said Smith.

But in China, the government permits neither free speech nor ownership of property. And instead of allowing people to pursue their dreams, most citizens of China are educated in a skill according to what's needed by the government. Just because a teen in China wants to be a teacher, doesn't mean he can pursue that profession. It depends on if the government needs it, said Smith.

Most people think of England as being pretty free, but all of the property in England is owned by the crown, the King and Queen of the country.



Camp REACH student Aaron Capp Tarver.

She also explained that taxes in many other countries are higher than in the United States.

She told them that the laws of the land are based on the laws in the Bible and she quoted Daniel Webster who stated, "Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens."

Webster's cousin was Noah Webster who is credited for creating the Webster's Dictionary.

Smith emphasized that everyone is created in the image of God and has "unlimited potential." Then she challenged students to fulfill the potential given to them.

"You are literally, physically created to be in the image of God," she said. "And then you get to choose what you fill yourself with. Fill yourself with stuff that is worthy of your wonderful mind, your wonderful will and your wonderful soul."

Willie Kitchens Teaches Youth at Camp REACH



Willie Kitchens, former lead singer of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame group The Impressions, talks to students at Camp REACH.

By Jaelyn Moon, 14, of East Ridge High School

Willie Kitchens, former lead singer of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame group, The Impressions, brought his skills and talent to Camp REACH this summer.

"You are a little bit off pitch," said Kitchens after listening to the Camp REACH choir sing. "We can work on that."

The choir sings at Hope City Church at noon July 14. The event is free and open to the public. Students will also participate in a Spelling Bee, discuss reading improvements they've made through the

Lexia Reading program and act in a skit about Mary Walker, a former slave who learned to read at age 116.

Timietha DeLaney, who also teaches choir at the camp, says she hopes the choir and camp give teens an outlet to positively channel their energy and an appreciation for discipline.

"A lot of us, we don't get discipline at home," she said. "I want them to learn and grow, learn how to respect themselves, respect others and have self-control."

Several students engaged in conversation and music lessons with Kitchens.

"I like that he didn't go on and on



Jaelyn Moon, 14, attends East Ridge High School.

preaching, or lecturing. He got right into the lesson or the fun part," said LaToria Battle, a 14-year-old upcoming freshman at The Howard School.

Kitchens promised that by the time the six-week camp ended, the group made of high school students from around the city would better understand stage presence and music.

The local pastor and professional singer has a lot of experience to share.

He released a 12-song gospel jazz CD in 2021 titled "You Kept Me" that tells how God never gave up on him

despite his life struggles. But he is best known for joining as lead singer of the Impressions in 1999. The rhythm and blues group, which started in Chattanooga and once included the late lead singer Curtis Mayfield, was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in the early 2000s, said Kitchens.

Kitchens grew up in Chattanooga and fell in love with music. By age 16, he was a skilled bass guitarist and background vocalist. His father, Willie Kitchens Sr., taught him to play the guitar at age 10. Six years later, Kitchens joined the Five Sons of Calvary as a bass guitarist and background singer. He taught himself to play the harmonica, electric keyboard and piano, according to the website, <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/willie-kitchens-41>.

At REACH, he did an amazing performance for students that included rapping, singing and even playing the piano. His main style is gospel music, but he can do it all.

"Somebody asked me today, do I do everything?," said Kitchens. "I said well I do a lot."

Then he performed a rap that left campers clapping and standing on their feet.

If you go:
What: End of Camp REACH showcase
When: noon July 14
Where: Hope City Church, 7 North Tuxedo Ave.
The event is free and open to the public.

Roundtable: from front tin Luther King Blvd., since purchasing and renovating its two-story 3200 square foot building in 1999.

Roundtable attendees had an opportunity to participate in a fun networking activity and to consult with life and business coach Dejaun S. Jordan, as well as representatives from LAUNCH Chattanooga; the Tennessee Small Business Development Center; and the Urban League; among others.

They also had a chance to soak in the sounds of DJ KStylz while sampling some of the signature dishes and beverages of the featured MLK vendors.

"I spoke at a Black entrepreneur-

ial summit this week in Nashville, and I was really excited to see...I was like, it was really palpable in the room, the connections that were being made between these Black and Brown entrepreneurs," said Karen Collins, director of Supplier Diversity at the City of Chattanooga.

"And I saw that in Nashville, but I know we can have that right here in Chattanooga, Tennessee. You don't have to go to a Memphis. We can create that kind of spontaneity, connections, and ecosystems right here. Anybody ready to help me do that? We want to do it right here!"

Collins received a standing ovation.



Edwards, in front with mike, speaks to Minority Business Owners and Vanessa Jackson, City of Chattanooga Representative, looks on. (CNC Photo: G. Faye Stoudemire)